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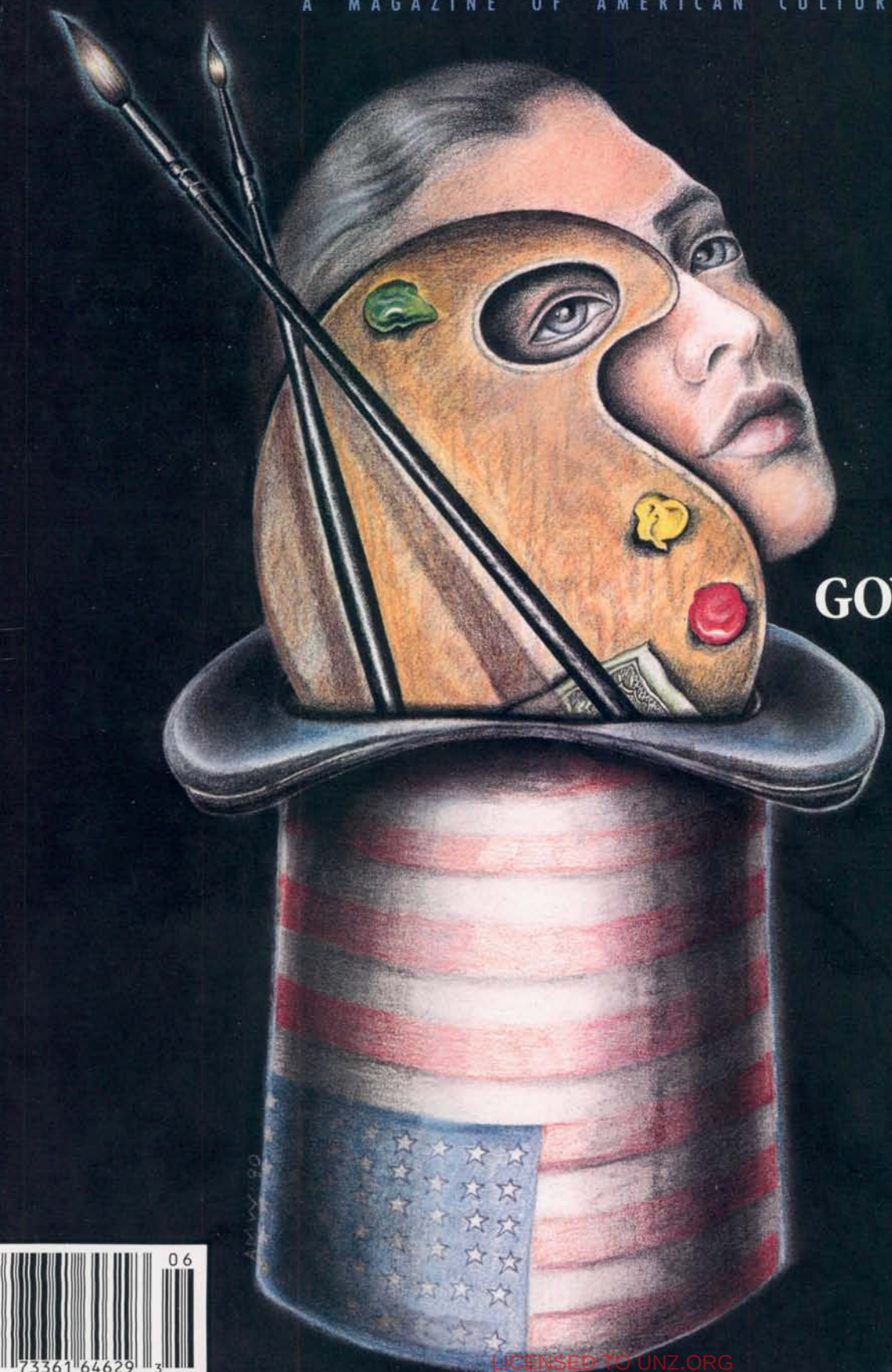

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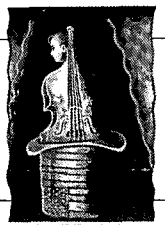
Chronicles
A MAGAZINE OF AMERICAN CULTURE

"Our love of what is beautiful does not lead to extravagance; our love of the things of the mind does not make us soft. . . . I declare that our city is an education to Greece. . . ."

—Pericles



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A Publication of
The Rockford Institute

Editorial and Advertising Offices: 934 North Main Street, Rockford, IL 61103.
Editorial Phone: (815) 964-5054.
Advertising Phone: (815) 964-5811.
Subscription Department: P.O. Box 800, Mount Morris, IL 61054. Call 1-800-435-0715, in Illinois 1-800-892-0753.
For information on advertising in Chronicles, Please call Cathy Corson at (815) 964-5811.
U.S.A. Newsstand Distribution by Eastern News Distributors, Inc., 1130 Cleveland Road, Sandusky, OH 44870.
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CHRONICLES (ISSN 0887-5731) is published monthly for $21 per year by The Rockford Institute, 934 North Main Street, Rockford, IL 61103-7061.
Second-class postage paid at Rockford, IL and additional mailing offices.
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to CHRONICLES, P.O. Box 800, Mount Morris, IL 61054.

The views expressed in *Chronicles* are the authors' alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Rockford Institute or of its directors. Unsolicited manuscripts cannot be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope.

Chronicles
A MAGAZINE OF AMERICAN CULTURE
Vol. 14, No. 6 June 1990

On 'The Other God That Failed'

I am writing to avert any possible confusion between a book recently reviewed in your magazine (January 1990) and a work of my own. To be sure, no one who actually read my book, *The Other God That Failed: Hans Freyer and the Deradicalization of German Conservatism*, would be likely to confuse it with the one reviewed in *Chronicles*. Your reviewer, Lee Congdon, says I "clearly" identify with Peter Collier and David Horowitz, and that I am transfixed by American neoconservatism. My book mentions neither of these writers and barely touches upon the radicalization or deradicalization of Americans in the 1960's, though it does deal more broadly with patterns of political radicalization and deradicalization among intellectuals on the left and right since the French Revolution. Later in the review, a purported flaw in the book's characterization of its subject's political role during the Third Reich is accounted for via a long and loose deductive chain, somehow running from a murky attack by Russell Kirk against those who are too fond of democracy through a rhetorically exaggerated self-characterization by Norman Podhoretz, on to drugs in contemporary America, and finally reaching the purported relationship of contemporary American neoconservatives to the Enlightenment. The reader is told that I am among those who maintain that a historicist critique of the Enlightenment "must be fatal" and "despise the Counter-Enlightenment and the historical thinking that questions the universality of reason's dictates and insists upon the relativity of political and social arrangements."

My book, by contrast, asserts that "the correlation between the Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment traditions and subsequent political ideologies is by no means tidy. If liberalism, cosmopolitanism, socialism and communism owed more to the Enlightenment, and conservatism, nationalism, and fascism more to the Counter-Enlightenment, it was also possible to deploy arguments based upon the universalist rationalism of the Enlightenment tradition to coerce the recalcitrant at home and abroad, just as it was possible to draw upon the intellectual arsenal of the Counter-Enlightenment to promote tolerance based upon a respect for diversity. . . . Both traditions were susceptible to totalitarian reformulations by their twentieth-century legatees."

This is only one example of the many divergences between the claims of my book and the one reviewed. Should the historical problem of the relationship of intellectuals to the stabilization and destabilization of liberal-democratic governments interest the editors of *Chronicles*, they may want to assign *my* book for review to the Lee Congdon whose careful scholarly work on Georg Lukács is treated as such in *The Other God That Failed*, rather than to the hatchet-man who apparently read my book in search of some hook on which to hang an attack on contemporary American neoconservatives.

—Jerry Z. Muller
Department of History
Catholic University of America
Washington, D.C.

Lee Congdon Replies:

Professor Muller's angry letter puzzles me. In my review I commended his "exhaustive research," "honest account," and "fair description." But I argued that, consciously or not, he had read the American neoconservative experience back into the history of German conservatism. Like many deradicalized ("second thoughts") New Leftists, Hans Freyer, we were told, "emerged as a spokesman for a brand of conservatism reconciled with liberal democracy." (p. 317) In the United States, we call that brand "neoconservatism," because it maintains that a totalitarian logic informs the older—historical and anti-democratic—conservatism. According to Professor Muller, who frequently contributes to *Commentary*, America's leading neocon-

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servative magazine, "the intellectuals who pinned their hopes on movements on the totalitarian left and those who looked to the totalitarian right often drew from common traditions and from one another in formulating their radical critique of liberal democratic capitalism. Hans Freyer and Georg Lukács, for example, both had their intellectual roots in neoromanticism and neo-Hegelianism. . . ."

In light of that declaration, one wonders why he writes of the "purported" relationship between neoconservatism and the Enlightenment. Everywhere in his book he suggests that the Enlightenment provided a fertile soil for liberal democracy, while Freyer's historicist critique of the Enlightenment "lay behind the works of his radical conservative phase." (p. 333) To be sure, he concedes that Enlightenment can also arrive at despotism, but he hastens to add (p. 17) that those who repented for carrying its ideas to extremes experienced little difficulty in making themselves over into liberals and social democrats. "Radical" (historical, anti-democratic) conservatives such as Freyer, on the other hand, accepted liberal democracy grudgingly, if at all.

Professor Muller writes that his book deals "more broadly with patterns of political radicalization and deradicalization among intellectuals on the left and right since the French Revolution." That, surely, is a large and worthy theme — and one all too familiar in contemporary America. In treating it, *he* constructed a chain of reasoning that led to the Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment. Having raised reasonable, if not unanswerable, objections to his analysis and historical judgment, I regret that he has elected to make name-calling do duty as a rejoinder.

On 'It's a Black Thing'

I was shocked at Llewellyn Rockwell's complete misinterpretation (Cultural Revolutions, March 1990) of what William Raspberry wrote. Until your March issue, I had always assumed that what people wrote in your magazine was reasonably accurate.

As closely as I can recall, Rockwell quoted Raspberry accurately, but he took the columnist's words in an extremely narrow and literal sense. As Rockwell quotes Raspberry, "A Congressional Black Caucus is legitimate," while a "Congressional White Caucus would be unthinkable," etc. What Rockwell did not understand, and what you failed to check, was that Raspberry was writing rhetorically.

In fact, on reading the *Post* my wife and I were both amazed that a black, generally liberal columnist had the sensitivity to test the feel and sound of such absurdities, and then had the guts to write about his reactions. That's exactly what Raspberry did. His list of incongruous statements was quite complete but sadly funny, the latter because as many of us know, realistically, a Congressional White Caucus *is* "unthinkable." Raspberry came to realize this, and described how he eventually understood that T-shirt slogans such as "It's a Black Thing . . . " may not, after all, be "hip, humorous, and race conscious in a healthy sort of way."

I hope *Chronicles* doesn't devolve into another silly forum where anyone can smear words onto a page and gain a moment's recognition for himself.

— *Robert Goranson*
Woodbridge, VA

Mr. Rockwell Replies:

Mr. Goranson wants to shout hosanna because William Raspberry admits there's a racial double standard — even if he endorses it.

Maybe people who live for too long in the *Washington Post's* delivery area become inured to liberal-think. Maybe they see nothing wrong with having a professional black for a columnist, a man who analyzes everything in racial terms, and who has only one criterion: is it good for the blacks? Any white writer taking the same position would long ago have been exiled to the Insensitivity Gulag.

Raspberry approves of "the Black Thing" mentality only for "low-prestige out-groups" like "gays, Chicanos, [and] blacks," but not for "high-prestige groups." "My own reactions," he says, "vary with the social status of the group touting its specialness." Because of this double standard, he won't tell "young blacks [to] get rid of their 'It's a Black Thing . . . ' buttons, badges, and sweat shirts" until the equallennium.

In another column (December 23, 1989), Raspberry says it might be a good thing if blacks believed that all their troubles were caused by a mythical white conspiracy, and acted on it. Race hatred would be a great motivator. (He jokes to black audiences, by the way, that he knows there's no conspiracy because whites "aren't smart enough." Imagine that turned around.)

"Is there a white conspiracy? The trouble is not with the illogic of the question," concludes Raspberry. "The trouble is our refusal to behave as though we believe the answer is yes."

Oh? William Raspberry may be subtler than Spike Lee, but he'd throw the trash can through my window just the same.

On 'Postwar Oxford'

In my "Postwar Oxford" (April 1989) I intended no hint of cowardice in any Oxford dons of the time nor, rereading it, do I find the shadow of any such imputation therein. All the same, Mr. Terrence Neal Brown's hypersensitivity (Polemics & Exchanges, July 1989) has persuaded me to ask *Oxford Today*, which was interested in reprinting the piece, not to.

I made one factual error he did not pick up, however: Charles Williams died just before that period. I was up to him antebellum. Sorry about that.

— *Geoffrey Wagner*
New York City

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AMERICANS HAVE always had a healthy suspicion of government snooping. When George Washington's administration undertook the first census in 1790, under the supervision of Thomas Jefferson, it only counted heads. Yet the public resisted on a massive scale.

At that time, Americans were widely familiar with the biblical anti-census story of First Samuel. King David told Joab: "Go through all the tribes of Israel from Dan to Bersabee, and number ye the people that I may know the number of them." Joab cautioned against the King's arrogance: "What meaneth my lord the King by this kind of thing?" But King David pushed ahead, and once eight hundred thousand had been counted, he was struck by the enormity of what he had done: "I have sinned very much in what I have done; But I pray thee O Lord, to take away the iniquity of thy servant, because I have done exceedingly foolishly." The Lord sent a pestilence and seventy thousand died.

The modern census has brought a different type of pestilence: social engineering, affirmative action, economic "fine-tuning," and subsidies and privileges galore.

In colonial times, demographic records were largely kept by the elders of the church; no government enumeration of all the colonies was ever undertaken. The Constitution, however, required a simple head count. Section 2 of Article 1 says: "Representatives and direct taxes shall be apportioned among the several States . . . according to their respective numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole number of free persons, including those bound to service for a term of years, and excluding Indians who pay no taxes, and three fifths of all other persons." The fraction and provisos were, of course, superseded by the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868.

But over time, census questions became increasingly invasive. In 1810, the government asked about machinery, and in 1850, it counted every member of the family, not just the head of the household. At the turn of the century, the government employed an army of census clerks, and in 1940, a sizable rebellion was incited by questions such as "do you have a toilet or privy?" and "how much money [in general] do you make?" Senator Charles W. Tobey (R-NH) denounced this as intolerable, un-American, a violation of the Bill of Rights, and lacking legislative authority. A group of housewives in New York organized an anti-census broom brigade. A woman from Kenmore, New York, said she knew of seven hundred women ready to go to jail rather than reveal their incomes to the census-taker, and merchants in Washington, D.C., launched an "Anti-Snooping Club."

In 1970, controversy broke out again. Inner-city residents refused to open their doors to census-takers, and a Wisconsin assemblyman urged constituents only to give their name, address, sex, and marital status. South Carolinian resistance was so strong that many enumerators resigned their jobs.

The 1990 census was more detailed and intrusive than any in history. It asked about ethnicity and race, the number of toilets, air conditioning, fuel and rent costs, how many children women have borne, how many times a person has been married, and more. Five out of six households answered 14-question forms; the rest answered an additional 19 questions, and a few had a total of 59 questions. Providing all this information, Americans were told, "is important to you, your community, and the Nation."

Homeless advocate Mitch Snyder and his band of bums refused to be counted, undoubtedly because their inflated estimate of three million homeless would be revealed as a fraud. Regular Americans advanced a more legitimate objection: if one has the right to keep family affairs private from neighbors, why not from the government?

The Census Bureau claims to keep our answers confidential from other tax and police agencies, but our history is replete with broken government promises (for example, the 1933 confiscation of the people's gold). The census promise could be wiped out in an instant by executive fiat, and all resisters labeled unpatriotic.

Thanks to the census, the government now has an up-to-date, computerized dossier on every American citizen, in addition to the one kept for revenue purposes. Even if census data isn't turned over to more hazardous agencies, it will be used to govern us more comprehensively. The data are used to propagandize for the "non-traditional family," so that it can receive legal encouragement; for more programs for the underclass, already devastated by the present welfare system; more public schools; favors to industry; job retraining programs; more redistricting along racial and ethnic lines; and for generally divvying up federal loot among pressure groups.

Some businessmen defend the census because they can use its data in marketing research. Indeed, as the director of the 1970 census said, it is "a gold mine for business." But corporations are perfectly capable of gathering the information they need voluntarily — as they do already.

In April 1976, the last great census opponent, Congressman John Ashbrook (R-IL), introduced an amendment to "remove all the penalties, monetary as well as prison penalties, for refusing to answer a census question." The government is going "far beyond the original intentions of the census," he said on the House floor. "The Government already compels too many things under penalty of law. Let us draw the line here and now in this one area."

The House agreed and voted overwhelmingly (248-140) for the Ashbrook Amendment. But, as is often the case, it was removed during the off-the-record conference stage.

Today's penalty for not answering is $100, although it is virtually never imposed. In 1980, one man was harassed five times, but never gave in, and was never fined. Answering the form falsely, however, carries a fine of $500

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for individuals and up to $10,000 for businesses.

Under the Constitution, the census should count adult heads and nothing more. No ethnic or racial questions. No income questions. No toilet questions. No who-is-living-with-whom questions.

Maybe by the next census, Americans will be reading the Constitution and First Samuel again. If so, they won't put up with another decennial census and the pestilence it brings in its wake.

—*Jeffrey A. Tucker*

THE 1990 CENSUS arrived last week, along with the usual past due notices and Gold Card applications. I am one of the lucky Americans who received the long form, which asks for such inconsequential data as how much I earn, which of the myriad minorities I swear allegiance to, and how much money I spent on utilities. Even to track down the information would have taken several hours, and after reading through the form I could not find any mention of payment for my time and trouble. Besides, my children are something like one-thirty-second Native American, and I would not want any careless answer of mine to blight their prospects of joining the ever-growing class of minority victims.

I've been through all this before, back in 1980, when a census-taker with the long form tracked me down to my own God's Little Acre in McClellanville, South Carolina. She was obviously a nice person, an unemployed schoolmarm, but I did not ask her in. Government agents are like the Devil: it is always safer not to invite them to step across your threshold. You see, she explained, all this apparently private information is really the government's business, because they have to make plans and allocate resources. To do that, they have to determine where poor people, especially poor minorities, live.

I said then what I say now. I don't want the government to allocate resources or to waste my tax money on government programs to help white social workers to enslave "minorities." What is more, I am opposed on moral grounds to the whole idea of government statistics. As Murray Rothbard pointed out in a recent issue (Winter 1989) of the *Journal of Libertarian Studies*, the federal government began collecting statistics in a big way only during the Progressive era. In World War I Edwin Gray rose to prominence as head of the statistical department of the War Trade Board and later as head of the Central Bureau of Planning and Statistics. The gathering of statistics was a crucial element in this first attempt to create a command economy in America. Small wonder that Gray saw what he called "that wretched Armistice" as "almost . . . a personal blow." As Rothbard observed, Wilson's planning boards were only the trial runs for FDR's more ambitious experiment in social engineering.

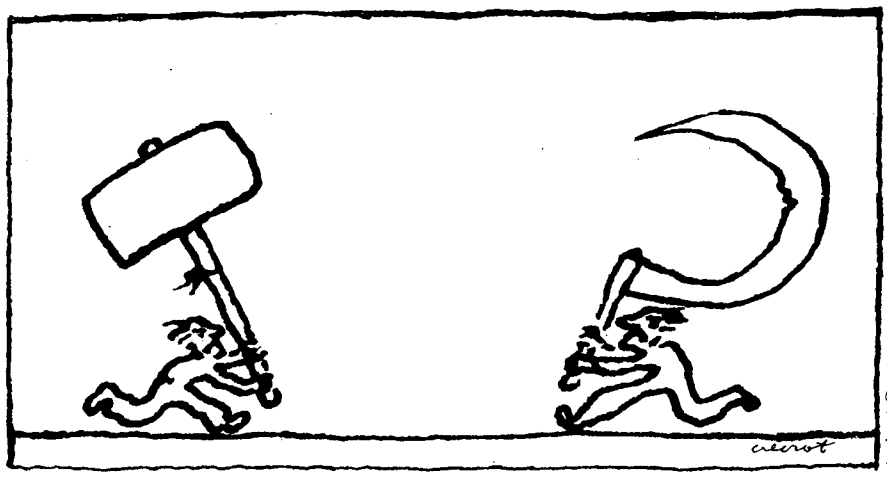
The Census Bureau, however, assures me that it is my duty as a good citizen to fill in the entire form. I believe in obeying the law, and as most of our readers must be aware I take a Lutheran view of civil disobedience and would repress nuclear protests and Operation Rescue with the rigor usually exercised against other revolutionaries.

However, conscientious refusal is not civil disobedience. If the government told me to kill my children or divorce my wife or compose atonal music, I would politely decline on the grounds that there is a higher law that we must obey and that our own civil order depends upon this higher law that has been acknowledged for several millennia. While I am not justified in breaking good laws to protest bad, I am required not to do those things I know are wrong. State socialism is worse than inefficient and repressive; it is, as I and many people believe, immoral. It makes war upon families and communities; it subverts the moral order; it corrupts the taste and deprives life itself of half its savor. State socialism depends upon statistics, graphs, and charts. The planners have to know how many bathrooms I have, if they are to tell me, some day, that I have exceeded my quota of bathrooms, water, and children. They have to know if I am white or black or Pacific Islander, before they can decide upon my official status. Once upon a time, it was enough to be free and a citizen. Now that liberty and citizenship have been emptied of meaning, the government is devising new status categories. At the top are the *honestiores*—corporate executives and government bureaucrats, while ordinary members of the working classes are now consigned to the lowest class of *humiliores*. From here it is only one step—as Hilaire Belloc argued long ago—to slavery.

And so for this reason and because toadying to statisticians and filling out forms and applications goes against my grain as a once-free American, I decline, for the second time, to fill out the census form. I do supply the information to which they are entitled by the Constitution: name, address, birth date. After all, even under the Geneva Convention a POW has to give name, rank, and serial number.

—*Thomas Fleming*

APARTHEID is the sole issue ever discussed in this country with regard to South Africa. Readers and viewers must occasionally ask themselves whether that huge and varied country,



Andrzej Czeczot

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with almost four times the area of France, presents really nothing but a two-dimensional picture, without any depth, any culture, any search for identity in a truly plural situation.

Yet there are many other realities down there to focus on, chief among them the Afrikaaners' tormented cultural consciousness — and consequent tragic failure to lift the weight of their loneliness. The burden of the tragic situation is borne entirely by the Afrikaaners, who cannot hide it behind the opulent banks and corporations of Johannesburg, the luxury hotels of Durban's Indian oceanfront, or the elegant residences of the Cape peninsula.

Try to imagine in American terms what happened to the Boers in the last century and a half. Suppose that around 1840 the British had reoccupied this country, settling on the east and west coasts with cultural and commercial interests tying them to Great Britain. Imagine further that Americans, still a rather small "tribe," had withdrawn to the Midwest (Ohio, Illinois, Iowa) to form another republic and to develop their own strong identity, hostile to the two coasts. Now this identity would have two flaws — but at this point let us abandon the American simile and return to South Africa: one flaw resulted from the Great Trek of 1838 to the interior which isolated the Boers from the outside world, leaving them in the position of a "white tribe," with their Bible as a cultural *and* political reference, and the laager mentality as their general strategy. A century later, when South Africa, now under Afrikaaner leadership, seceded from the British crown and Commonwealth, this mentality had become South Africa *contra mundum*. From the 1950's to the 1990's, that is between the British quasi-colonization and a rapid Americanization, the increasingly dominant Afrikaaners had neither the time nor the intention to adapt their sturdy native consciousness to the rules of the modern game. They never elaborated a common language with the Anglophones, from which a genuine white culture could have arisen. The English had their mother-country and the entire English-speaking world as their cultural home; the Afrikaaners, on the other hand, felt compelled to remain focused on the Calvinistic, Puritanical, Netherlandish church, which became a kind of protective tribal cult, and never permitted the relaxation so important for the soul and its sensibilities to create a cultural milieu.

The second flaw in the Afrikaaner identity, otherwise so boisterously asserted, is nostalgia for black culture with its more relaxed, less inhibited sense of identity. I go as far as to say that while English-speaking South Africans remained aloof to, or merely intrigued by, black culture — architecture, music, dance, painting, communal rites — Afrikaaners have seen in it something more genuine and earthy-spiritual than their own cold approach to the "nocturnal" side of existence. While teaching at various times in South Africa, I used to have long conversations with Afrikaaner colleagues — among them the Reverend Willem de Klerk, the president's older brother — who could not hide a yearning for some kind of fusion with the blacks. A cultural fusion, of course, but these men were at the same time aware that a political mixing would then be inevitable — and they acquiesced in it. Letters kept reaching me long afterwards, into the 1980's, trying to convince me — or rather, to convince themselves — that a cultural fusing of the two "tribes" (white and black) would not have to bring with it a unitary political system. I disagreed.

I believe that among other things what is happening in South Africa now is an expression of the policy of cultural nostalgia manifested by the Afrikaaners. Because of outside sanctions they feel more isolated than they did in the time of the undiluted laager. The English-speaking world, the U.S. now included, has proved more alien than ever — indeed an enemy. The opening can only be effected in the direction of the blacks. President de Klerk's policy — behind which I detect his *verligte* ("enlightened," liberal) brother's hand, the great influence on the president since their father, the tough Boer senator, died — does not aim at multiracialism, a completely destructive solution in South Africa; it is a policy based on the Afrikaaner intellectuals' feeling of cultural incompleteness and hope against hope that they and the blacks can build a valid, genuinely neo-African civilization and culture. Through peace with the blacks they hope to find an access to the *spirit* of the land that they have only shared physically with them. It should be added that this yearning is not shared by the bulk of the Afrikaaners who are still rooted in farms and small towns. They are, and probably will remain, in the laager; the intellectuals are of course urban products, and their number has increased considerably in the last two decades. Willem de Klerk is in a way their mouthpiece; Frederick de Klerk is their — somewhat reluctant — partner.

I knew very well one of these typically divided souls. The novelist (strictly in English) Stuart Cloete, a man from an old Afrikaaner family, a cavalry officer in 1914 in the British army, English to the core yet a bitter Boer who saw his people fight the uphill battle of nation-building, and run to the ground by Anglo-American liberalism. There have been many people like Cloete among the Afrikaaners. At an unbridgeable distance both from the British and from the blacks, they have proved too few to shoulder the burden of their perhaps imperial vocation, the holding together of a multitude of races. The Anglophones certainly did not help; but the main cause of this failure was the Afrikaaners' inability to create a genuine local culture beyond the lovely Boer building style, the folk music and dance, the imitation-American universities.

It may be impossible for American intellectuals to understand this failure. They were never isolated from Europe, the East Coast being a bridge over the ocean; their ancestors all but exterminated the autochthonous population (which the Boers never did) and its culture; and their background is purely urban. But even so it may be more interesting for them to reflect upon the South African cultural failure and the resulting tragedy, than to be exclusively preoccupied by the single issue of apartheid.

— Thomas Molnar

WHEN IAS (the Institute for Advanced Study), the research center that takes pride in having housed Einstein, told the National Endowment for the Humanities last December to take its

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money and shove it, the *New York Times* responded with a front-page, four column headline: "Endowment Embattled Over Academic Freedom." But it appears there was much less there than meets the eye, because nothing much has happened since then, except IAS ended up three-quarters of a million dollars poorer, and somebody else got the money instead.

What persuaded the institute to give up a quarter of a million federal dollars and jeopardize an application for another half million—and that's just for this year!—is new federal regulations that apply to regrant agencies the same procedures that for a quarter of a century have governed the endowment's own granting program.

Specifically, these regulations have always defined that when you apply for an NEH (or a National Endowment for the Arts) grant, your application goes for evaluation to a panel of experts, with a program officer of NEH present for the discussion. If the panel recommends, then the program officer reports to the National Council on the Humanities, the advisory council of NEH, and the council recommends to the chairman appropriate action.

The fiasco of last summer, when the National Endowment for the Arts (on the council of which I sit) found that a regrant agency had funded as art a jar of urine containing a plastic figure of Christ on the Cross, led Congress to ask, "Who's in charge?" And the answer turned out to be, on regrants, nobody. While applicants for direct funding by NEH or NEA undergo the process of panel and council review, applicants to agents funded by NEH or NEA do not. Those regrant agencies do pretty much whatever they please and, up to now, have been answerable to nobody.

Congress likes nothing less than unregulated spending of tax money, and rightly so. So in addressing the uproar of the Serrano scandal, Congress simply legislated that the same procedures that govern the two endowments when they make grants will now apply to regrant agencies as well. That means a program officer attends meetings that divvy up federal funds and the councils of the two endowments review the recommendations, just as they would the endowments' own panels.

Regrant agencies like nothing less than undergoing supervision in their use of tax money, and, in the academic world, the code-language for "no, no, no," is "academic freedom." And this is where the Institute for Advanced Study lept to the barricade, threw back the federal funds already appropriated, refused to conform to the congressional mandate, and expected to lead a national campaign against the NEH rule.

What happened then? Well, not very much. In fact, nothing. It turns out that, among the hundreds of regrant agencies in both the arts and the humanities, not a single one followed IAS. Everybody else took the money, spent it in accord with the procedures Congress had legislated—and applied for more. So much for academic freedom.

But "academic freedom" means different things to different people. Just now, in the Pennsylvania tenure case, the U.S. Supreme Court laughed at the claim that having to tell people in your own name, not anonymously, just what you said in a tenure letter somehow violates your "academic freedom." The Court could not understand why losing your license anonymously to defame abridges some freedom you used to have. And now, when the question is one of dollars and cents, a great many agencies managed to find reasons to accept procedures that IAS represented as a violation of its "academic freedom." Do they care less than IAS, and is IAS these days more "free" than anybody else? Few think so.

IAS Director Marvin L. Goldberger described the new procedures as "unwarranted, unreasonable, and largely unmanageable intrusion on fundamental matters of academic autonomy and integrity." Precisely why he invoked all these "uns" he did not specify. NEH did not tell IAS, "choose this one, not that one," nor did it even say, "this subject, not that subject," let alone, "this opinion, not that." All it said is, Congress wants regrant agencies to follow precisely the same procedures that apply to the endowments themselves. If individual and institutional applicants to NEH or NEA find the same procedure—panel and council review—quite warranted, quite reasonable, and quite manageable, why the regrant agencies should be exempt no one could explain.

How about a grant on political metaphors—Chicken Little against the Little Boy Who Cried Wolf, for instance? One of the institute professors recently gave a paper on "the rhetoric of reaction," with the point that reactionaries always reply to left-wing proposals with the same sort of answer, like, "it won't work," or "it's too expensive." When a mathematician asked, "Well, maybe sometimes it's not mere rhetoric because they might be right?" everybody laughed him down, and the professor didn't deign to reply.

This time around the rhetoric of the left invoked its cliché: academic freedom. The skies didn't fall. And nobody ran out to protect the sheep. All that happened is that to try to embarrass the endowments and the (Democratic) Congress that made the rules, the IAS threw away three-quarters of a million dollars on behalf of an academic freedom many thought not awfully different from mere self-indulgent privilege: the right to do whatever we want and never to have to answer why. To which a medievalist member of IAS with a long memory replied, "Who takes the king's shilling becomes the king's man."

—*Jacob Neusner*

MIKHAIL GORBACHEV has it, so do Jesse Jackson, Vaclav Havel, Nelson Mandela, and Violetta Chamorro. John Kennedy personified it, Ronald Reagan scripted it, and Michael Dukakis experienced what life can be like for a politician without it. It's how success and failure in national politics is so often now spelled: it's c-h-a-r-i-s-m-a.

Like so many of the words bandied about in popular culture, the provenance of the word has been all but forgotten. Derivative of the Greek *charis* ("grace") and *charizesthai* ("to show favor"), charisma originally meant a grace or a talent specially vouchsafed by God. The years, however, have taken their toll on this meaning, and far from denoting divine inspiration, charisma has come to mean nothing more than vitality or sex appeal. It's a charm to be cultivated, marketed, and learned through self-help seminars or self-actualizing tapes. In fact, the truly wise don't even need the

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tapes and seminars. As Doe Lang told us in *The Charisma Book: What It Is and How to Get It*, charisma is actually "within us all"—cabdriver, electrician, and *Chronicles* reader alike. All we need to do is to buy this book.

The person chiefly responsible for associating "charisma" with politics is Max Weber. Weber analyzed three types of political authority, one of which was the "charismatic." Weber described a charismatic leader as one who feels destined to carry out a mission because of the exceptional talents or powers he supposedly possesses. The charismatic leader requires wholehearted devotion from his followers, and the foundation of his authority is emotional rather than rational: it rests on trust, often blind and fanatical, and faith, often unrestrained and uncritical. Bound by neither institutions nor rules, customs nor precedents, the charismatic leader has unlimited power.

In other words, charismatic rule is the antithesis of our "government of laws and not of men." It is, by definition, anathema to the idea of constitutional democracy, political representation, and a system of checks and balances. Only a complete historical amnesia could therefore account for the extraordinary metamorphosis this word has undergone: no longer representative of the type of political authority that characterized the Old World and distinguished it from the New—the arrogant, dishonest, and pretentious form of charismatic rule known as the divine right of kings—charisma is now the pinnacle of political virtues we look for to praise in leaders both at home and abroad. And even if a political leader has none of the qualities or attributes currently considered "charismatic"—the sexy smile, the endearing grin, the ability to move an audience with a speech of rhythmic and alliterative platitudes—he or she is often adorned with the label nonetheless. For charisma has become the laurel we want and expect our leaders to wear.

The power that the word "charisma" now wields over our political process is astounding. Indeed, as Theodore White would have put it, a presidential candidate can no longer be sold without it. Charisma is the reason most often cited for Gary Hart's rise and Michael Dukakis's fall; the former had it, the latter did not. Many political pundits had written off George Bush in 1988 because he lacked the "charisma factor," that is, until the Democrats performed the impossible by coming up with someone even more nondescript than Bush. And what is the reason most often given for why Governor Mario Cuomo, Senators Bob Kerrey and Bill Bradley, and Lee Iacocca should run for the presidency? You guessed it.

The public has forgotten that charisma has never been an indicator of competence or a guarantee of political probity. In fact, modern history gives us no reason to think that a charismatic leader will be anything other than a charlatan, a sham, a demagogue, or a dictator. No one can deny that Hitler and Mussolini, or Jim Jones and Charles Manson, gained power on the basis of their charismatic appeal. Gary Hart's "charisma" didn't prevent him from taking his supporters for granted and sleeping with Donna Rice. Jack Kennedy will forever be remembered for his sex appeal, his womanizing, and for being assassinated, and not for any success as either policymaker or statesman. Ronald Reagan's charm in front of the cameras didn't help him to lower the deficit, to abolish the Department of Education, or to reduce the size of the federal government. And Gorbachev's "impromptu" jaunts through throngs of Washingtonians and West Germans may endear him to the masses and media folk alike, but they do nothing to shorten the lines of Russians who cue up daily for meat, bread, eggs, and potatoes.

Thoreau once said that he would run for cover if ever he saw a man approach his house with the conscious design of doing him good. Considering the current lust for charisma, there's no reason to think that we'd be smart enough to run.

—*Theodore Pappas*

THE FISCAL 1991 budget proposed by President Bush totaled some $1.2 trillion. This prodigious amount, larger than the entire Gross National Product of twenty years ago, is considered a "tight budget" in Washington. Politicians complain that they cannot find enough money to finance programs, while the hunt has been on to find programs to cut to keep the total down. The situation is so bad that Washington has invited Japan into such vital geopolitical arenas as Panama and Poland to provide the financial support the U.S. can no longer afford—a strategic development that may come to rank with Britain's abdication in favor of the U.S.

The budget has also been in deficit for a quarter century, and the national debt has doubled since 1984. This despite the fact that the federal government collected $330 billion more in taxes in 1989 than in 1984. Though there has been widespread concern about these continuing deficits, some economists have dismissed them. Paul Craig Roberts, for example, claims that during the 1980's "statistics show that the United States enjoyed one of the smallest deficits and slowest growth of public debt as a share of GNP in the world." There are problems with Roberts' argument, not the least of which is he may not have looked inside his aggregate figures. He asks, "If weaker countries can continue to carry on successfully with proportionately higher deficits, why do our smaller deficits doom us?" But his examples, Canada, Italy, and the Netherlands, are not Great Powers vying for global preeminence.

Nevertheless, Roberts makes a valid point in the abstract. Taking on debt is not always bad. It depends on the use to which the money is put. If it contributes to the expansion of the economy or of the nation's influence in world affairs, then it can be seen as an investment. Japan has a higher debt/GNP ratio than the U.S., most of it undertaken in the last fifteen years. Japanese debt has served to support rapid growth and to mobilize the nation's large pool of savings. In contrast, the U.S. has squandered its public funds like a Third World debtor regime.

Until the Vietnam War ended, the national debt could be justified as having been necessary to meet the nation's needs during wartime. However, the debt has tripled in the last fifteen years, during which there have been no wars. Measures of emergency war finance have now become standard peacetime operating procedures. This suggests the question of what the government would do if faced with an

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actual emergency.

The real budget problem is entitlement spending. Nearly half of the 1991 budget will consist of payments to individuals. The federal budget explicitly works to redistribute 12 percent of the nation's personal income in ways that are philosophically dubious but politically expedient. The battle of the budget has been fought mainly between promoters of these open-ended social programs on the left and defenders of the Pentagon on the right. There is, however, another sector which has been hard hit, a sector whose waning strength from malnutrition is slowing down the entire economy: public infrastructure.

The cutting in half of the rate of American labor productivity growth (from 2.5 percent during 1948-69 to only 1.1 percent during 1969-87) sparked a wave of studies of private investment. Government investment, however, has been largely overlooked. Of the nation's capital stock, 36 percent is in the public sector. The 1987 breakdown was 7 percent military; 18 percent core infrastructure (highways, ports, power plants, water supply and sewage systems); 8 percent for public buildings (schools, hospitals, prisons, courthouses, police and fire stations); and 2 percent for conservation and development projects.

Before the welfare state, such public investment was a major function of government, second only to the duty to provide for national defense. It is still the most important contribution to economic growth that the public sector can provide. Yet public works have been squeezed out of government budgets at all levels by the explosion in social spending over the last twenty years.

Investment in core infrastructure during 1969-87 grew at 1.3 percent while all other areas showed a meager 0.3 percent. Total federal investment gained 1.1 percent (down from 2 percent during 1948-69) while state and local investment increased only 0.9 percent (down from 4.7 percent during 1948-69). The large drop in state and local investment reflects the fact that the welfare state is not just a federal phenomenon. In 1970 state governments spent slightly less on welfare than on highways. By 1987, the states were spending more than twice as much on welfare as on highways.

Infrastructure investment has not been keeping up with the needs of the economy. As a result, not only are public services less available (schools and prisons are overcrowded, emergency services and utilities are inadequate) but roads, bridges, railways, and public buildings are wearing out. This generates a drag on the entire economy.

The deep inroads that foreign competitors have made in America's economic position have often been blamed on the preference Americans show for consumption in the present over investment for the future. Whether true as a general indictment, it is valid for government policies. Politicians believe that voting billions more for income transfers and social programs will garner more support than building power plants, jails, or waste disposal facilities. Until this perception is changed, the term Big Government will be a misnomer. Big it is, but it is failing to perform the duties of a government.

—*William R. Hawkins*

ARTHUR ASHER SHENFIELD

died on February 13 at the age of 80. A British lawyer and economist, he spent much of the last three decades as a visiting professor at American colleges and universities, setting forth with rare vigor and clarity the principles of the free market and its role as the only economic system compatible with political liberty. His distinctive qualification for this task was a recognition that all the institutions of a free society are dependent upon a disciplined and virtuous populace. In 1972 he was elected president of the Mt. Pelerin Society, the international association of market economists formed by Friedrich von Hayek and Ludwig von Mises. He and his wife, sociologist Dame Barbara Shenfield, lectured at the first national conference sponsored by The Rockford Institute, "Capitalism and Culture," in 1977. What follows are excerpts from his presentation.

The most significant feature of socialism in the United States is the fact that most American socialists call themselves liberals. They have effectively appropriated that splendid word "liberalism," which originally meant, and still properly means, the exact opposite of socialism; indeed, so effectively that their American opponents also dignify them by calling them liberals.

This fact is highly significant because in large measure it indicates the posture and character of American socialists. The famous pioneers of socialist thought have exercised only an extremely faint direct influence upon Americans and the American mind. I say this not because only a minute proportion of American socialists have ever read Marx or any other leading socialist theorist. That would not be decisive because only a minority of people in countries under Marxist rule, and probably only a minority of avowed and active Marxists themselves, have read Marx. The majority of people in all countries and societies take their ideas at secondhand. I say it because the great majority of American socialists would not agree with Marx or other leading socialist theorists if they read them, though it must be admitted that in the case of theorists espousing, or claiming to espouse, some form of democratic socialism, the disagreement would be partial and qualified. The truth is that, though there are cases where the adoption of the liberal label is a matter of subterfuge and deception, in most cases American socialists really do believe themselves to be liberals, and would honestly and perhaps indignantly reject the socialist label.

Yet they are genuine socialists, at least in the field of economics. They believe that the solution to all significant economic problems calls for some form or other of governmental intervention. When faced with any economic difficulty, their first and only thought is to call upon the power of government to deal with it, usually by some program requiring large public expenditure and a large bureaucracy.

. . . Contrast the wickedness of the modern Welfare State with what America once did for the poor of the World. "Give me your poor, your huddled masses," says the Statue of Liberty. But that America offered nobody free bread and butter, assisted housing, or anything else except freedom. No system of food stamps awaited the poor immigrant from Ireland, Italy or Poland. That America said

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"Here is the land of the free. Come and take this freedom and make of it what you can." Even the land offered to homesteaders was not a gift of anything other than freedom and opportunity. First, the great majority of immigrants came not for homesteads but for jobs in New York, Boston, Chicago, Pittsburgh, etc. Secondly, the homesteader received no title until he had worked the land for a number of years. Thus the title was really the counterpart to the wages which the worker was paid in the cities. Thirdly, the lots were vacant land. No one was taxed to provide the homesteader with his sustenance. That early America offered true fairness, not the fraudulent "fairness" of the minimum wage, state welfare and the rest.

. . . Thus I conclude that intellectual enlightenment can go far to cure the modern democratic state of its moral obliquity. How then ought we to proceed? Intellectual enlightenment preached to the desert air will of course have no effect. It needs to be linked with and supported by those forces in American life which are still essentially healthy. I believe that there are three from which the forces of regeneration may take sustenance. They are religion, patriotism, and pride in individual achievement. These are far from dead in America. Ally your intellect to them and you will move mountains. And your grandchildren will bless you for the America which you will have bequeathed to them.

Principalities & Powers

by Samuel Francis

"Black History Month," sometimes called "February," used to be about as exciting as National Jogging Week, but this year it stood up and pranced. First, executives at CBS gave the bounce to commentator Andy Rooney to punish him for unkind remarks he may or may not have uttered about the African-American gene pool. Then, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, lifelong liberal Democrat, arrived at Vassar College to harangue the students in the annual "Eleanor Roosevelt Lecture," only to hear himself denounced for "racism." Probably other, less illustrious citizens also fell under the month's lash for their insensitivity to such well-established historical truths as the negritude of Nefertiti and the African origins of the Pythagorean theorem, but their names have not surfaced and their fates are unknown. In any case, to humiliate a leading senator and nearly ruin the career of a nationally famous opinion-maker in the space of less than a month is itself no small historical achievement.

Yet the greatest accomplishment of this year's Black History Month was the decision of the New York State Board of Regents to scuttle the "Eurocentric" orientation of its entire educational system and to authorize development of a curriculum that would reflect, in the words of the *New York Times*, "the contributions of non-white cultures" to American civilization. The most likely such plan, which already exists and which New Yorkers spent most of January and February fretting about, is the now-notorious "Curriculum of Inclusion," which recommends sending Eurocentric values, ideas, and assumptions to the back of the school bus.

The plan, written by Dr. Henry Hamilton of the State University of New York at Albany, where he chairs the Department of Atmospheric Sciences, begins with the assertion that "African-Americans, Asian Americans, Puerto Ricans/Latinos, and Native Americans have all been the victims of an intellectual and educational oppression that has characterized the culture and institutions of the United States and the European American world for centuries." The purpose of the new curriculum is to destroy that "oppression" by overturning and reversing the racial and cultural dominance on which it is based.

One way to achieve that purpose is to insist, as the report and its appendices do throughout, that European and American civilizations are themselves derived from or dependent on non-white and non-European races and cultures (the term "minorities," the report warns us, merely reflects the assumption that the European-descended majority is dominant). Thus, the report faults the current syllabus on "Global History" used in New York schools because it fails to acknowledge sufficiently that "the latest scientific evidence has established Africa as the birthplace of humanity and the earliest cradle of civilization. . . . The African factor is crucial in world history and the Nile Valley is fundamental to appreciating its significance." The new teaching on the role of Asians and blacks in American history will emphasize the importance of their labor in the economies of the Far West and the Old South, and neither the Framers nor even poor old Christopher Columbus is sacred any more.

"The erroneous and racist attribution of Christopher Columbus as so-called 'discoverer' and 'civilizer' of Native Americans [i.e., Indians] can be exposed as an essential part of the ideology of 'white nationalism' designed to justify the exploitation and eventual genocide of indigenous Americans," writes Leonard Jeffries, head of the Black Studies Department at CCNY, in an appendix to the report. Exploring the contributions of "Native American" traditions to American government can combat the "racism" of the Constitution and the quaint conceit that the Framers had any original ideas. "Some of these ['Native American'] traditions, such as the Iroquois system of governance," writes Dr. Jeffries, "have had an impact on the development of institutions and practices of the State of New York and the United States." Anthropologist William A. Starna, incidentally, in a letter to the *New York Times* on March 7, 1990, noted that "no good evidence exists to support" the idea that the Iroquois had any influence on the forming of the U.S. Constitution. But that's only one of the falsehoods the "Curriculum of Inclusion" perpetuates.

The curriculum's goal is not simply to supplement school courses with increased knowledge about the contributions of nonwhites to American civilization but to challenge the merits and legitimacy of "Eurocentric" culture itself. "An educational system centered

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around the Eurocentric world view," the report informs us, "is limited and narrow." "The near exclusion of other cultures in the curriculum gives European American children the seriously distorted notion that their culture is the only one to have contributed to the growth of our society." It makes white children "arrogant" and instills in them the idea that they are "part of the group that 'has done it all,'" while exerting "harmful" effects and "negative socialization" on nonwhite children.

Conservatives and neoconservatives, of course, have generally howled splenetically in response to the "Curriculum of Inclusion," and properly so. But, as is common in such responses, they often seem not to have grasped firmly the fundamental issue the proposed reforms raise.

U.S. News & World Report's John Leo, for example, was one of the first columnists to criticize the report (November 27, 1989), while praising an alternative curriculum reform co-authored by neoconservative education expert Diane Ravitch that was adopted in California. The California plan, Mr. Leo wrote, "frankly celebrates America's democratic values — freedom, tolerance, equality, the rights and responsibilities of citizenship — not as the inventions of a white power structure but as the heritage of all Americans, regardless of color." Similarly, Scott McConnell and Eric Breindel, criticizing the "Curriculum of Inclusion" report in the *New Republic* (January 8-15, 1990), accurately noted that "European intellectual traditions" were "essential to the establishment of political democracy on these shores," and they argued that

> in the years since the Founders, immigrants from all over the world have come here because they were attracted by that democracy and the vibrant economy it engendered. This blend produced a genuinely pluralist society — indeed, the very concept of pluralism is itself a product of the European (or "Eurocentric") tradition.

But the problem with such criticisms of "A Curriculum of Inclusion" is that they fail to recognize that "America's democratic values" and "pluralism" are not only precisely what the "Curriculum of Inclusion" is rejecting, but also that pluralism in itself contains nothing with which to prune the budding totalitarianism that the report manifests. Indeed, by acknowledging the legitimacy of even anti-pluralistic ideas and their expression, pluralism provides the soil in which totalitarian minds and movements can sprout. The "multiculturalism" of "A Curriculum of Inclusion" exploits pluralist assumptions to demand acceptance. But since it rejects any serious commitment to the values of Western liberalism, its advocates have no intention of preserving pluralist mechanisms.

Moreover, regardless of the rhetorical and propaganda excesses of "A Curriculum of Inclusion," it is bang-right about one thing: American civilization historically has been the product of European-descended peoples and their ideas. What else can "Eurocentric dominance" mean? The language, the religion, the dominant political institutions, the economic organizations and goals, and the literary, intellectual, and aesthetic traditions that have informed American culture from its inception have all derived from Europe and its peoples. It is all very well to point to black cotton-pickers and Chinese railroad workers, but the cotton fields and the railroads were there because white people wanted them there and knew how to put them there. Almost all non-European contributions to American history either have been made by individuals and groups that have assimilated Euro-American ideas, values, and goals, or have been conceived, organized, and directed by white leaders.

At least implicitly, the "Curriculum of Inclusion" acknowledges this truth; it just doesn't like it, and its authors resort to the most labyrinthine confusions about the role of nonwhites in American history to get around the truth and reverse it. What they are seeking, then, is not simply to join a civilization that has excluded and subordinated them and their peoples but to delegitimize it and destroy it, with the idea of replacing it with their own conception of civilization, to which whites themselves will be subordinated.

Of course, "A Curriculum of Inclusion" is not the only such challenge to historic American civilization. It is all of a piece with the attack on "Western culture" courses at Stanford a couple of years ago and at other universities and colleges across the country. At the elementary and secondary levels, a group called the "National Black United Front" is launching similar assaults on school curricula in at least ten major American cities and school systems, according to Carol Innerst of the *Washington Times*, with the purpose of expunging what its activists call the "white supremacy" of the public schools. "Now that we are clear," says NBUF's chairman, Conrad Worrill, "that the European world did not bring the light of civilization to Africa, and in fact it was the other way around — Africans in ancient times had a profound influence on the rest of the world — we ought to put African contributions at the center of the curriculum." And, of course, feminist and homosexual activists seek similar "revisions" of traditional curricula to challenge male heterosexual dominance. No wonder this year's Black History Month was such fun.

The total assault is part of the struggle for what the Italian Communist Antonio Gramsci called "cultural hegemony," the subversion and control of the dominant ideas, values, tastes, and moral standards of a society, which is an essential precondition for seizing political power and without which enduring revolutionary power is not possible. The assault is also part of the continuing cultural dispossession of the historic core of American civilization, and as such it enjoys at least tacit support from the already dominant elites that gain power through managing and manipulating social change and which therefore thrive on "pluralism."

Invoking "pluralism" and "democratic values" will do nothing to resist the assault but will only legitimize it, since the attackers rely on such slogans of liberalism and the sanctity these slogans enjoy to move their vanguard forward. Those Americans who want to preserve their historic civilization will need to reassert their own hegemony against that vanguard, and incantations of pluralism and democracy will be of less help to them in achieving it than a firm insistence on the greatness of who they are, where they come from, and what they have achieved. ◈

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Anna Mycek-Wodecki

The Art of Revolution

by Thomas Fleming

Most Americans don't know much about art, but they do know what they don't like, namely blasphemy, pornography, and perversion. When they began to realize, in the course of 1989, that their own government, through the National Endowment for the Arts, was funding exhibitions of homosexual photographs and crucifixes in urine, they blew off enough steam to heat the entire city of Washington for several weeks.

Many sensible people wondered why a government agency would subsidize a revolution against public taste and decency. Doesn't the American system, they asked, depend upon certain broadly accepted standards of right and wrong, and aren't those standards undermined by the likes of Mr. Serrano and Mr. Mapplethorpe? Isn't there a conflict, they wondered, between the surgeon general's crusade against AIDS and the NEA's campaign to promote homosexuality? Why, in sum, would a regime deliberately set out to undermine itself?

To ask these questions is to misconceive—and misconceive seriously—the nature of political regimes. Individual political actors may be reckless or occasionally honest; entire political classes may grow too fat and lazy to look after their own interests (as they did in Eastern Europe); but no regime deliberately spends its surplus capital on projects that might lead to its own destruction. If the NEA's atrocities against public decency were only a case of misunderstanding, it would be a simple matter to persuade them of their mistake.

This sort of optimism is the grand illusion of American conservatism: if only we could enlighten the responsible people in government and business, if only we could show them that the interest of the nation depends upon a return to "traditional values," then congressmen would join with bureaucrats, businessmen, and professors in an effort to restore an America that has not existed, for the past fifty years, anywhere outside the campaign speeches of Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan.

This is never going to happen. People like Senators Simon and Kennedy—indeed, most men and women in positions of power—actually like things the way they are. To be sure, they might prefer safer streets or a lower divorce rate, but not at the expense of a free and democratic people who would insist upon running their own affairs. Our rulers might not positively enjoy the idea of funding strippers as art, but any degradation is preferable to the dangers lurking in a community of artists and writers that were not lackeys of the regime. They have only to look at Czechoslovakia and shudder: why weren't the communists smart enough to subsidize Vaclav Havel?

Whenever a political community undertakes to commission or support the arts, the main object is not beauty or truth but defense of the regime. In their private capacity, tyrants and kings are free to indulge their own taste in buying paintings and in patronizing writers whose works they admire. Stalin is said to have assisted even Bulgakov, a writer he must have regarded as a political problem, and Charles II of England put up with the Earl of Rochester's impudence far longer than the poet deserved.

But what kings and tyrants do personally has to be

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distinguished from their activity as public art patrons. Stalin is said to have wept when he ordered the death of Osip Mandelstam, but the poet's murder was an affair of state. The same Stalin, along with Hitler and Mussolini, created and fostered artists and architects whose works embodied the aims of their ideological regimes. If you visit the Ara Pacis of the Emperor Augustus in Rome, you will discover that it is in a neighborhood dominated by fascist architecture whose tell-tale ugly inscriptions invite an unflattering comparison with the noble lettering on the emperor's monument to peace and plenty. (You may even see my name spray-painted in black on a wall of what looks to be a fascist building, underneath a sign for Alfredo's.)

Augustus, too, along with his friends, was a great patron. He rebuilt much of Rome and befriended both Horace and Vergil. Neither of these poets was a lackey of the Augustan regime, but both willingly lent their pens to its support. Today, when we assume that all great artists are self-declared enemies of the people, it is fashionable to treat Vergil as a secret opponent of the Princeps' restoration, but that is reading back our own misconception into the ancient world.

It is not only kings, tyrants, and strongmen who know how to employ art in the service of the state. The first great imperialist democracy, Athens, devoted enormous resources to rebuilding temples on the Acropolis, and we have only to think of David to realize to what extent the ideology of the Revolution permeated French art at the turn of the 19th century.

But wait. The public art of Greece and Rome is magnificent, and David, although a loathsome person, was a great painter. Even the monuments of Hitler and Stalin are popular in style and occasionally interesting as works of art. Surely I am not saying that in America our official art is the repulsive and amateurish bric-à-brac subsidized by the NEA? Yes, that is exactly what I am saying. Postmodernism is not only the art of our regime, but it provides the best clues for discovering the nature of the modern American state.

Like most Americans, I do not know much about modern art. Anything after *art nouveau* (in manner if not in time) is too *nouveau* for my taste, too poor for my blood. Still, I do go to museums and sometimes do not entirely succeed in carrying out my intention of avoiding the 20th-century wings. Perversely, they always seem to be placed as an obstacle between Greek vases and the Impressionists. The opinion I have formed over the years is consistent with the popular taste of the cabdrivers and car salesmen, who continue to believe that art should be beautiful and represent things either as they are or ought to be, although as one modern artist observed of another:

> things are seldom as they are
> When played upon the blue guitar.

To me and to the cabdriver who drives me to the museum, contemporary art is a) ugly, b) artless, c) offensive to the morals of most responsible stick-up men and hardworking professional killers. "Why they wanna put up stuff like that?" he asks. "Used to be you could take your family to the Whitney. But who wants to see two guys going at it? It's disgusting. Besides, look at that junk" — he points to a stack of garbage cans he mistakes for a piece of public sculpture — "Hey, my kid could do better'n that with finger-paints."

Because I grew up speaking with the accent of a music critic being interviewed on NPR, most cabbies or barroom debaters assume they can get a rise from me by putting down highbrow art and music and books. But I agree with them. I have always agreed with them, even when I was the sort of person I sound like. But, I ask them, what is the point? Assume for the moment that the effect of modern art on most of us is not unintentional; what would that tell us?

Take ugly. If art is ugly, if we come to believe that all art is ugly and that beauty really is in the eye of the beholder, then there is no chance that ordinary people might enjoy painting, music, and poetry. In earlier centuries, most concert-goers came to appreciate music through performances of contemporary works. Mozart's audiences did not attend *The Marriage of Figaro* and sigh: "This is OK, but it ain't Monteverdi." Beethoven and Brahms were not just a big success: they served to define music for their contemporaries.

In the United States and Western Europe, the last composers to attract such popular attention were probably Puccini and Richard Strauss, although from what I can gather Prokofiev and Shostakovich made a powerful impression on Russian audiences. There is a wonderful passage somewhere in Solzhenitsyn's *First Circle* where the Zeks eagerly await a radio broadcast of a Shostakovich symphony. In my lifetime I have never experienced that sort of eager anticipation for a new work of a favorite writer or composer, except for the period when Anthony Powell was putting out the volumes of *A Dance to the Music of Time*.

And in painting, my experience with modern and postmodern art has been so dispiriting that it largely put me off going to exhibitions of contemporary artists. Those with more public spirit who do go and put themselves under the influence of contemporary masters will inexorably find themselves drawn into the moral and aesthetic universe of Mr. Warhol and Mr. Serrano, a bleak and disoriented landscape of joyless homosexualism, pointless violence, and malevolent impiety toward all received wisdoms. It is the milieu of proles and street people, of the cowards and lackeys who would take no risks that might interrupt the monotonous round of expensive ethnic cuisines and disembodied orgasms. For the present, it is *Brave New World* spiced with *A Clockwork Orange*, although there is already an undercurrent of *Bladerunner* that bubbles up like an overflowing sewer to disturb the revelry in a world that is postmodern, postfamilial, postmoral, and postpolitical.

What is the creed of state postmodernism? Something might be put together by a student willing to wade through a stack of grant proposals or to read copies of journals subsidized by the NEA and CCLM, but the results would be misleadingly vivid: sado-masochism, child-molesting, and coprophagia are in, monogamy is out. Violent revolution and pacifism, tribalism and universalism are celebrated with a passionate pluralism that can embrace everything but loyalty and restraint. It is a misleading picture, because the writers of these manifestos are for the most part quiet little drudges addicted to prescription drugs and nonviolent (i.e., safe) protest. Our ideological state promotes their delusions and eccentricities in the same way that the Soviets used to

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trot out official dissidents like Yevtushenko to prove that they were really open-minded. American radicals are, in a literal sense, the loyal opposition, because they support the cultural and moral goals of the regime: social dissolution, decay of community, and the sense of helplessness and anomie that encourages dependency. Where's the danger in that? You have only to read their poems to realize how really harmless they are.

But much of this degradation might have been accomplished through serious and technically proficient works of art. Why the insistence upon funding incompetent garbage? Ah, but here is the essential point. There have always been rakes and devils in the fellowship of great artists and writers. In modern times, it seems sometimes as if there are no good men in a literature dominated by Shelley and Byron, Baudelaire and Gide and Lawrence. But rakes have a way of reforming, and men who take great risks are sometimes tempted to take the ultimate risk by putting their faith in God. As Screwtape tells the audience at the Tempters' Training College dinner: "The great . . . sinners are made out of the very same material as those horrible phenomena the great Saints." Rochester repented, and Baudelaire's later poems could convert a legion of minor devils. The nastiest writer of this century, Céline, was after all a reactionary rightist.

No, you simply cannot count on a craftsman of any kind. An honest carpenter or a competent poet will both rebel against the mediocrity and cowardice required by an ideological regime. Edward Abbey was a liberal, after all, but when he believed something he could not bring himself to lie about it. Besides, an important aspect of today's official art is the cabdriver's reaction: "My kid could do better." Of course she could, and that means that standards of excellence do not really exist. All of us really are equal, not just in the sight of God, but in our talents and abilities. We are all creative, aren't we, all endowed with the inalienable right of expressing our inner selves, whether it is by collecting junk or flashing our private parts in public. When there are no objective standards, we are all on the same level until a panel of experts bends down from the sky and gilds our pile of excrement with golden grants from the NEA or from one of the countless private foundations that exist only to subvert the moral and aesthetic order. Then upon these poor ephemera of humanity "a heaven-sent ray of sunlight falls and life flows like honey."

SKIP THIS PARAGRAPH if you are in a hurry, because I am going to insert the usual mealymouthed and equivocating qualifications that are required whenever an American speaks his mind. Yes, of course the NEA and Guggenheim and MacArthur occasionally slip up or get pressured into rewarding a writer or artist with real merit, and of course there is an occasional honest and intelligent person driven by poverty and despair into accepting a job with a government agency, and of course I have friends, more than I like to admit, who have sat on the councils of the NEH and NEA (in one case both) and whose intentions I regard as entirely honorable and praiseworthy, although I can hardly cite an instance where their presence has done enough good to offset the mere fact that their participation lends legitimacy to an illegitimate operation. "But I can see to it that some of the money is spent wisely," they argue, "and it would be worse if we let the crazies dominate the council." This is what I call the humane-concentration-camp-guard argument: "Think how much worse it would be if we let the Nazis run the camps. At least I can treat the prisoners with some decency and humanity." Go ahead, I admire your strength of will in humbling yourselves in the seats of power, and I stand in awe of the way you can plug your nose while attacking the Augean stables with a Handi-wipe.

Bad poetry and obscene photographs are only the most revealing instruments of the official propaganda. Government education, from Headstart to graduate school, sends a similar message. Apart from the scientists and their apprentices, whose penchant for truth we indulge both out of necessity and out of religious awe, the people in charge of American schooling are simply the less flamboyant counterparts of the artists. They are equally committed to mediocrity (which they call equality), incompetence (in pursuit of equality), and dishonesty (in the service of equality). The present generation of humanities professors can scarcely recall what a real man of learning is like, although they must have run into a few doddering examples in their student days, and by the year 2000 the art and discipline that went into making a genuine scholar or man of letters will be a historical curiosity, like stained glass. There are exceptions, but they are as rare as grammatical Latin must have been in the sixth century.

Like scholarship, poetry and painting and the other high arts were once traditional skills handed down from master to disciple and from father to son across the generations. They were not far removed, in spirit or status, from humbler crafts. The Roman artists' guild, the Academia di S. Luca, included mere craftsmen (such as gilders) among its members in the days of Caravaggio, and in later years it continued to induct them as second-class members.

Art as a skill or craft partakes of the guild mentality, which at its best sets quality above profit. Since the 19th century, however, artists and writers have seen themselves not as members of a craft guild but as participants — or enemies — of the marketplace. Some writers, like Dickens and Trollope, became successful entrepreneurs; others rebelled against the notion that "*to kalon* is decreed in the marketplace," but until this century the rebellion most often took the form of a nostalgic longing for an older Christian community of the Middle Ages or early Renaissance. This is the thread that runs from the Romantics through the aesthetes and decadents to the generation of Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and Eliot (to say nothing of their older contemporaries, Belloc and Chesterton).

The First World War destroyed a great many illusions, and *l'art pour l'art* was vaporized along with the conviction that civilization could somehow be restored. Nonetheless, the 20's and 30's seethed with possibilities. The movement most pregnant with circumstance was not the reactionary modernism of Eliot, Pound, and the agrarians, but the progressive modernism of Dada and futurism, whose leaders resolutely turned their backs on the past and set out to overturn all aesthetic and moral conventions. To realize how uncreative an age we live in, one only has to compare the most outrageous stunts of the past twenty-five years with the manifestos and projects of Tristan Tzara and Marinetti.

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What was fresh and impudent in the 20's is now as "weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable" as all the other cultural "uses of the world."

The final result of the cultural revolution that coincided with World War I is that a writer or painter today has two paths before him: a profitable career as capitalist artist or a comfortable sinecure as artist-rebel. If he decides to become a capitalist, then he will with any luck crank out a series of Stephen King novels or society portraits like so many microwave dinners: tasteless, insubstantial, and liable to turn a delicate stomach but, at the same time, immensely profitable to the patent-holders. (Notice, by the way, how popular novels are advertised as "the new Barbara Cartland" or the latest "Jay McInerney" as if they were automobiles.)

The other career path is the professional antisocial rebel. This means, in practice, taking on the government as patron: university jobs, major grants, tax-subsidized publications, exhibitions, and lecture tours. All that is required of you is to parrot the lies of the regime: the American family is a sick institution, Western man is racist and sexist, Christianity has poisoned the water and killed off the whales, etc., etc. The solution to each of these crises is more money for social agencies, more money to fight racism and pollution, and—do not forget—more money for "the Arts"—a relatively new term which very nearly gives the game away by lumping together poetry and sculpture and macrame as so many officially licensed diversions. And with more money come more and bigger government agencies to tell us how to live our lives and increased power for a managerial/executive class that functions as our more powerful analogue of the crumbling Soviet *nomenklatura*.

It is for this if no other reason that national elections change nothing. It will not matter whether we send Democrats or Republicans, conservatives or liberals to Washington, until we find candidates willing to challenge the regime itself. This will mean pulling the plug, or at least short-circuiting the agitprop machine—the NEA, the NEH, the Department of Education, and all their satellite agencies in the states. It would also mean eliminating the federal presence in colleges and universities and reconverting all our schools from indoctrination centers to places of learning. If higher education turns out to be too expensive for most students, perhaps they will discover how fundamentally useless is an American college degree.

Some artists and writers with a gift for teaching would remain in the academy; others, once they could no longer get their fix of "money for nothing," could either turn professional and produce salable works or else find patrons or sponsors. Frankly, I am not too worried. There will always be a market for pornography and blasphemy, and in a decentralized culture intelligent rich people might once again learn to trust their own taste and judgment, which will always be superior to the official standards of "good enough for government work." ⟨C⟩

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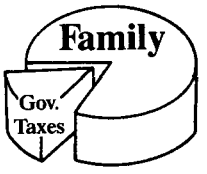

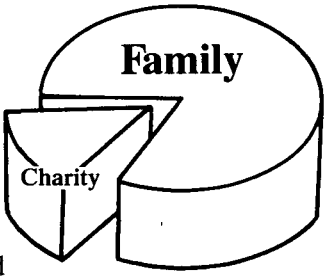

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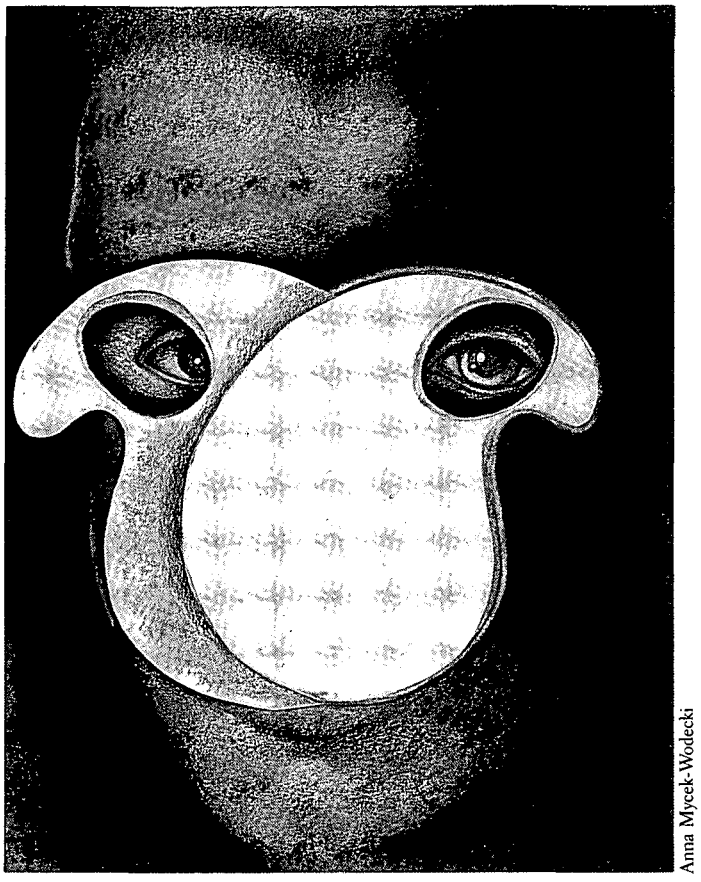

Anna Mycek-Wodecki

Art Is Always Political When the Government Starts Giving Grants

by George Garrett

"In the background of the entire tedious debate over the NEA, the First Amendment has loomed, misunderstood and abused as usual, claimed by some as justification for their right to express a preference for causing pain to others during the sex act and asserted by others as the basis for a constitutional right to receive federal grants."

—Raymond Solokov

Speaking of the subject of censorship and the arts in general, and, more specifically, the whole affair in these recent months (filling many newspaper pages) about the problem of the American taxpayer and the government's support or nonsupport of the arts; speaking of freedom and of censorship, then, particularly, here and now, represented by the ways and means, the action and inaction of the National Endowment for the Arts, hereinafter called the NEA; speaking of these things—and why not? Everybody else is—I do, in fact, have a few things to say.

First off, I need to admit honestly to the angle from which I view things, the point of view with which I bear witness. Besides being a part-time writer and a full-time teacher, I am by now listed here and there as a Democrat and an Episcopalian. A Democrat of New Deal origins and versions. An Episcopalian who is happier with the language and theology of the 1928 Book of Common Prayer, but who, for the time being, is obedient to the wit and wisdom of our bishops.

As a Democrat I can hardly pretend to argue against any and all kinds of government involvement with the arts. As a Roosevelt/Truman Democrat, however, I am inclined, indeed required to trust the people in their wisdom, to honor the thoughts and feelings of what has now come to be called

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"the mainstream." That's how Democrats used to win the big elections—by showing a serious respect for the thoughts and feelings of the American majority.

As an Episcopalian, I am somewhat more committed to the aesthetics of religion than most other sects, though, as a Christian, I still have to believe that the aesthetic experience is not essential to either faith or efficacy of religious practices. There are some people who believe Picasso was God. I can't and don't. Kierkegaard identified the aesthetic as the lowest level of our spiritual experience, ranking beneath the ethical and the religious. It seems to me an irrefutable argument.

For the power and glory of freedom of speech I look back to the example of the late great Justice Hugo Black, himself a model New Deal Democrat. He was a literal-minded absolutist in these First Amendment matters; though Black did not include anything except actual speech, pure and simple, under his rubric of complete freedom. That is, he did not believe in any such thing as "symbolic" speech, the language of gestures. It is clear that he would not accept the pouring of blood or public peeing or the burning of flags, etc. as forms of speech. Neither can I.

The NEA was political from the outset. Which happened to be in the early 1960's during the Johnson administration. Kennedy, with "Camelot," had already proved how easy it was to co-opt the artists, if not the arts. And William Faulkner, then in residence at UVa, had seen through Kennedy and very politely told him so when he allowed that a dinner for Nobel Prize winners at the White House was "too far to go for supper."

Faulkner was right. I have seen more than one artist co-opted by a black-tie dinner. Lyndon Johnson kept most of the artists happy (at first) and paid off a bunch of political debts at the same time by creating the NEA. There wasn't a whole lot of money in it at first, not enough honey to attract the usual crowds of flies. They came later. But there was some money and, by and large, it was handled wisely and well. Some of it was strictly political. For example, as the 60's were just beginning to heat up, at home and abroad, the Johnson White House passed the word all around, even to the fledgling NEA, to do all that could be done to buy off Vietnam protesters and to keep minority kids off the streets. The former were handled ironically but efficiently, by supporting people, little magazines, and small presses which were most active and prominent in the anti-war movement. Dissent paid off handsomely for some.

Similarly, long before affirmative action, the word came down to create and to give as many fellowships and grants as possible to young minority artists of all kinds. This was easier said than done, because in those days the government had forbidden any racial or ethnic listings on their official forms. In order to make sure that the grants were going to black artists, white Southern artists, deemed especially sensitive to details and nuances of race, were brought in as consultants.

Is that funny? Maybe. One thing for sure, it was indisputably political.

It never occurred to the Johnson administration that anything took place that wasn't political. It never occurred to them (him), either, that the new generation, the Baby Boomers who kicked up their heels in the late 60's, would never feel in the least beholden to anybody for any gifts they were given. They mostly took the money and ran amok.

Truth is, though, lots of good and decent things, some of them personal and altogether honorable, happened in those first years of the NEA.

Under Nixon, and ever afterward, there was more and more and more money, never enough to suit everybody in the avid art world, but enough to arouse the interest and greed of many, and over a decade or so to cause, nationwide, the spontaneous generation of arts commissions and councils in every state in the Union and the creation of a new and quickly entrenched bureaucracy of (newly named) arts administrators. There were now, in the area of literature alone, hundreds of grants awarded annually, selected from among several thousand applicants. Conventional politics entered into the process less and less. Almost all of the members of the Literature Panels were, to one degree or another, members in good standing of the New Left. People outside of the precincts of the left had next to no chance to win themselves a grant. That much was understood.

There were some distinctly positive developments. For instance, the support of ethnic and minority writers (I am speaking of literature now as the area I know about; but literature may be taken as typical and exemplary), who had next to no audience or opportunity, allowed for new voices of the nation to be heard. Without the NEA, that is, finally, without taxpayer support, many of these writers would never have been heard of at all.

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What is chosen is not at all accidental. It simply follows from the process of selection that the notorious *Piss Christ* was deliberately chosen from among many, many competing works of art. It was chosen, then, as it had to be, deliberately to offend.

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The bloody battles for a place at the public trough became, for most of the 1970's, matters of aesthetic and internal factional warfare. In a very real sense *censorship* was being exercised by the advisory panels of the NEA on both aesthetic and personal grounds. By 1978 there was a growing chorus of complaint, solidly based, against the cronyism and banal hanky-panky which had become more the rule than the exception at the NEA. The actions of the 1979-80 Literature Panel became widely known as a particularly egregious example of all this, thanks to an objective investigative study, "Go Down Dignified: The NEA Writing Fellowships," by novelist and photographer Hilary Masters.

Originally written on assignment for *New York* magazine, Masters' article finally appeared in 1981 in the *Georgia Review* (Vol. 35, No. 2, Summer, pp. 233-245) after being accepted, then dropped, under pressure, by several prominent literary magazines, including the *Massachusetts Re-*

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view. Truth is the *Georgia Review* was sternly warned and pressured not to publish the Masters piece, the danger being that not only the magazine, but also the University of Georgia Press and the university, itself, would pay dearly for the indiscretion of allowing a forum for criticism of the NEA. Stanley Lindberg, editor of the *Review*, was somewhat hesitant and tentative, and he did allow David Wilk, director of the Literature Program, space and opportunity to respond to the implications of Masters' article in the same issue; but it was and is to his credit that he allowed the piece to be published at all.

It is a devastating report, and some measure of its impact and Wilk's failure to produce an adequate response is demonstrated by the rash of letters forming the "Readers' Forum" in the winter 1981 issue of the *Georgia Review*; one of which came from Wilk, himself, and concluded: "For anyone who may wish to know, I have resigned from my position as Literature Program Director, effective 20 November 1981."

After the shake-up, things, in the Literature Program at least, have never been quite the same. Applications for grants are now cloaked in anonymity. There are now some specific guidelines covering such routine problems as conflict of interest and cronyism. These were a long time (almost twenty years) coming and can still be deftly evaded, but they help keep the process of grants and awards—to individuals, to little magazines and small presses, involving, all in all, millions of dollars—cleaner than it used to be. There is a very serious question as to whether it is possible to embrace any more purity or to eliminate any more corruption.

I myself have been actively involved, first in the very early days of the NEA and then more recently, during the 1980's, in the advisory Literature Panel. I can report that a lot of people work fairly hard on these matters and try to do right while doing a good job. I must also report that, in the highly politicized society we live in, various kinds of censorship, quite aside from aesthetic quality, are regularly practiced in the selection process. Most prominent ethnic and special interest groups are well represented on the panel. This allows for the establishment of a subtle kind of quota system—everybody gets a little gravy. And ideally, I suppose, they tend to cancel each other out; though I have seen any number of occasions when an application was voted down and out for the failure to demonstrate politically and socially "correct" attitudes. This kind of snap judgment is often, even in its own terms, extremely unfair, since it is based upon unacceptably crude critical assumptions and practices such as believing that the chief character or characters of a story can be taken as directly representing the social and political views of the author; unless, of course, the author steps in and boldly disassociates creator from the character. For many contemporary special interest groups the only truth is their truth and the only criteria of quality (itself an "elitist" concept) are those things which work to support the group's goals and point of view. No big news here. Every student at UVa knows that the same kind of thing can make a serious difference in the grades he or she receives.

In sum, then, the system may be as fair as it can or ever will be. But it is, nevertheless, inherently unfair when thousands of professional artists apply for grants and support and only one in twenty, say, has any chance at all. The advisors are looking for reasons to reject people. These days those reasons are often (and automatically) political and social.

All of which means that long before something or other comes to the attention of a Jesse Helms or anybody else, all sorts of censorious forces have been at work. It also means this: what is chosen is not at all accidental. It simply follows from the process of selection that the notorious *Piss Christ* was deliberately chosen from among many, many competing works of art. It was chosen, then, as it had to be, deliberately to offend those sensibilities which can (still) be offended by such things in this country. To that extent it was certainly a wonderful success.

I hope you see clearly what I am saying: that once (and whenever) the government is involved in the arts, then it is bound to be a political and social business, a battle between competing factions. The NEA, by definition, supports the arts establishment and the competition and the winners.

Whether or not it is fair and just to ask the mainstream American taxpayer to support the NEA and all its offspring, through thick and thin and with no influence at all on the process or the results, remains to be seen. Meantime it is altogether appropriate for the problem to be posed, for the question to be asked.

There are, of course, all kinds of solutions. One is to do away with the personal grants altogether and for the government merely to support needy cultural institutions—theaters and dance companies, operas and orchestras, paying particular attention to equitable and geographical distribution of funds all across the country. This matter of geographical distribution is, however, a matter of debate. New York City, believing itself to be the cultural capital and headquarters of the nation, central in all the arts, except maybe clog dancing, demands the wolf's share (the lion's share is all there is) of cultural support. We can go to them and pay for the privilege. In terms of established accomplishments, they have a point. But so do those who believe that, with some support, this nation is large enough and various enough to need more than one cultural center.

If you have to have personal grants, a lottery, like the old draft lotteries, is probably the fairest way to do it.

I have heard a reliable rumor that a friend of mine has just turned down a $40,000 lifetime achievement grant from the NEA. Not because he doesn't need the money—he has precious little. But because he has long been an outspoken critic of individual grants, and meant it, and did not wish to betray his principles. He also happens to come from North Carolina and had a well-founded feeling that his award was, in fact, a move in some kind of a game with Senator Helms. He didn't want to be anybody's pawn, not if he could help it.

Perhaps he represents the only real solution to the problem. All we need is astounding courage and integrity—courage and integrity in Congress, at the NEA, among artists of all kinds and yes, among the patient and loyal mainstream Americans who know full well, integrity or not, they will end up, as always, paying for all of it. ◈

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The New Class Controversy

by Christopher Lasch

Anna Mycek-Wodecki

The recent successes of the American right depend, in part, on its ability to deflect lower-middle-class resentment from the rich to a parasitic "new class" of professional problem-solvers and moral relativists. In 1975, William Rusher of the *National Review* referred to the emergence of a "verbalist" elite, "neither businessmen nor manufacturers, blue-collar workers or farmers," as the "great central fact" of recent American history. "The producers of America," Rusher said, "have a common economic interest in limiting the growth of this rapacious new non-producing class." The idea of a new class enabled the right to invoke social classifications steeped in populist tradition — producers and parasites — and to press them into the service of social and political programs directly opposed to everything populism had ever stood for.

If the new class is a "muddled concept," in the words of Daniel Bell, it is because we can never be sure just what social grouping it is supposed to refer to. But this imprecision, though it weakens the analytical value of the new class idea, adds to its polemical value as an all-purpose term of political abuse. Played off against the business class, it enables the right to attack "elites" without attacking the corporate elite. Businessmen, it appears, are responsible and public-spirited; they are accountable to the consumers to whom they sell their products, just as practical politicians are accountable to the voters; and the market thus limits any power they can hope to exercise. The new class, on the other hand, is accountable to no one, and its control of higher education and the mass media give it almost unlimited power over the public mind. Yet the members of this class still feel marginal and isolated: the more power they achieve, the more they resent their lack of power.

Another version of the new class plays it off not against business but against the technical intelligentsia. Bell himself, notwithstanding his reservations, has used the notion of a new class on several occasions — not always in the same way. In *The End of Ideology*, he contrasts the "intellectual" with the "scholar," evidently to the advantage of the latter. The scholar has to assume responsibility for a "bounded field of knowledge," but the free-floating intellectual acknowledges no responsibility except to himself. In *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, Bell argues that the nihilistic hedonism celebrated by adversarial intellectuals undermines the work discipline required by capitalism (though he also argues, well beyond the limits of the neoconservative consensus, that capitalism itself encourages hedonism and is thus at war with itself).

In *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*, however, the "new men" refers to the "technical and professional intelli-

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gentsia" whose skills have become essential to the maintenance of an "information society."

> While these technologists are not bound by a sufficient common interest to make them a political class, they do have common characteristics. . . . The norms of the new intelligentsia—the norms of professionalism—are a departure from the hitherto prevailing norms of economic self-interest which have guided a business civilization. In the upper reaches of this new elite—that is, in the scientific community—men hold significantly different values [from] those authorizing economic self-aggrandizement, which could become the foundation of the new ethos for such a class.

Unfortunately, the ethic of professionalism has to compete for the allegiance of the "knowledge class" with the "apocalyptic, hedonistic, and nihilistic" ethic promoted by literary modernism and popularized by the counterculture. In the closing pages of *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*, Bell argues that "these anti-bourgeois values . . . go hand in hand with the expansion of a new intellectual class huge enough to sustain itself economically as a class. . . . This new class, which dominates the media and the culture, thinks of itself less as radical than 'liberal,' yet its values, centered on 'personal freedom,' are anti-bourgeois."

In general, neoconservatives take a kindlier view of the new class when they identify it with scientific and technical expertise than when they identify it with cultural radicalism. In *Between Two Ages: America's Role in the Technetronic Era*, Zbigniew Brzezinski, later Jimmy Carter's national security adviser, praises the technical elite while condemning literary intellectuals and political militants in the usual terms. Since the latter come "from those branches of learning which are most sensitive to the threat of social irrelevance," their "political activism" can be explained as a "reaction to the . . . fear . . . that a new world is emerging without either their assistance or their leadership." Peter Berger makes a similar distinction between responsible specialists and discontented intellectuals, who suffer from a nagging fear of impotence, among other ailments. "Intellectuals," Berger writes, "have always had the propensity to endow their libidinal emotions with philosophical significance. . . . One suspects that the need for philosophy arises from an unfortunate combination of strong ambitions and weakened capacities."

Although the new class often seems to refer only to literary intellectuals and their "adversary culture," it can easily expand, when the need arises, to embrace bureaucrats, professional reformers, social workers, and social engineers as well as literary types. In this version, the new class seems to refer to anyone working in the public sector. According to Irving Kristol, it consists of "scientists, teachers, and educational administrators, journalists and others in the communications industries, psychologists, social workers, those lawyers and doctors who make their careers in the expanding public sector, city planners, the staffs of the larger foundations, the upper levels of government bureaucracy, and so on." Charles Murray's description is even more expansive: "the upper echelons of . . . academia, journalism, publishing, and the vast network of foundations, institutes, and research centers that has been woven into partnership with government during the last thirty years." Murray includes even politicians, judges, bankers, businessmen, lawyers, and doctors—at least those who are liberals. From this point of view, the new class can be recognized not so much by its culture of hedonism as by its relentless pressure for an "activist federal government committed to 'change,'" as Michael Novak puts it. Professionals in the public sector want massive federal programs, according to Novak, because such programs create "hundreds of thousands of jobs and opportunities" for "those whose hearts itch to do good and who long for a 'meaningful' use of their talents, skills, and years." As Novak, Murray, and Kristol see it, the culture of the new class is not just anti-bourgeois but anti-business. It aims to replace private enterprise with a vast bureaucracy that will undermine initiative, destroy the free market, and subject everything to central control.

These wildly divergent descriptions of the new class make it clear that the term refers to a set of attitudes objectionable to the right, not to an identifiable social grouping, much less to a class. It serves the right simply as a vague synonym for liberalism. Its explanatory power is weakened not only by its sociological imprecision but by the right's refusal to implicate capitalism in its indictment of our moral and cultural confusion. As an explanation of "permissiveness"—itself a shallow description of the contemporary malaise—the concept of a new class overlooks more obvious explanations. Consider the right's attack on the mass media, according to which the new class controls the media and uses this control to wage a "class struggle" against business. In view of the media's dependence on advertising revenues, it is hard to take this contention seriously. Advertising and the requirements of capitalist consumerism, not anticapitalist ideology, govern the depiction of reality in the mass media. The right complains that television mocks "free enterprise" and represents businessmen as "greedy, malevolent, and corrupt," like J.R. Ewing. To see anticapitalist propaganda in a series like *Dallas*, however, requires a suspension not merely of critical judgment but of ordinary faculties of observation. Images of luxury, romance, and excitement dominate such programs, as they dominate the advertisements that surround and engulf them. *Dallas* is itself an advertisement of the good life, like almost everything that comes over the media—for the good life, that is, conceived as endless novelty, change, and excitement, as the titillation of the senses by every available stimulant, as unlimited possibility. "Make it new" is the message not just of modern art (the "adversary culture" deplored by neoconservatives) but of modern consumerism. The modern capitalist economy rests on the techniques of mass production pioneered by Henry Ford but also, no less solidly, on the principle of planned obsolescence introduced by Alfred Sloane when he instituted the annual model change. Relentless "improvement" of the product and upgrading of consumer tastes are the heart of mass merchandising, and these imperatives are built into the mass media at every level.

Even the reporting of news has to be understood not as propaganda for any particular ideology, liberal or conserva-

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tive, but as propaganda for commodities—for the replacement of things by commodities, use values by exchange values, and events by images. The very concept of news celebrates newness. The value of news, like that of any other commodity, consists primarily of its novelty, only secondarily of its informational value. The news appeals to the same jaded appetite that makes a child tire of a toy as soon as it becomes familiar and demand a new one in its place. Propaganda in the usual sense of the word plays a less and less important part in a consumer society, where people greet all official pronouncements with suspicion. The effect of the media is not to elicit belief but to maintain the apparatus of addiction. Drugs are merely the most obvious form of addiction. If drug addiction is one of the things that undermines "traditional values," as the right maintains, then the need for drugs—that is, for commodities that alleviate boredom and satisfy the socially stimulated desire for novelty and excitement—grows out of the very nature of a consumerist economy.

It is only in their capacity as quintessential consumers—as drug addicts, as it were—that young professionals dominate the airwaves and set the tone of American life. Their distinctive manner of living embodies the restless ambition, the nagging dissatisfaction with things as they are, that are fostered by a consumer economy. Their careers require them to spend much of their time on the road and to accept transfers as the price of advancement. Though they complain about having to move so often, their willingness to travel long distances even in pursuit of pleasure suggests that they would find a more settled life unendurable. "Leisure," for them, closely resembles work, since much of it consists of strenuous and for the most part solitary exercise. Even shopping, their ruling passion, takes on the character of a grueling ordeal: "Shop till you drop." Like exercise, it often seems to present itself as a form of therapy, designed to restore a sense of wholeness and well-being after long hours of unrewarding work. "I feel like hell and I go out for a run, and before I know it, everything's O.K." Shopping serves the same purpose: "It hardly matters what I buy, I just get a kick out of buying. It's like that first whiff of cocaine. It's euphoric and I just get higher and higher as I buy." Sociological profiles of the "compulsive shopper" report that 40 percent are "most likely to buy something when 'feeling bad' about themselves." According to a summary of these studies in the *Wall Street Journal*, shopping serves as a means of "alleviating loneliness," "dispelling boredom," and "relieving depression." "They don't really need what they are shopping for. Often they don't even know what they're after." A survey of shoppers in malls indicates that only 25 percent come to buy a particular item.

Such evidence suggests that consumerism is a more serious threat to "traditional values" than the allegedly anticapitalist ideology of the new class. It suggests that the threat to those values, moreover, is not very fully or clearly described as a spirit of hedonism and self-indulgence that undermines the work ethic. The new class is just as addicted to work as to exercise and consumption. The intrinsic satisfactions in this work, to be sure, are usually overshadowed by external rewards—high salaries, social status, the expectation of promotion, frequent changes of scene. But there is no lack of willing, not to say compulsive, workers. What is missing is the kind of work that might evoke a sense of calling.

Even if we could agree with the superficial diagnosis of "permissiveness" as the chief threat to the old values, we would find it hard to resist the conclusion, then, that "if there is one clear and ubiquitous source of permissiveness," in the words of Barbara Ehrenreich, "it lies, as it always has, in the consumer culture." Modern capitalism, Ehrenreich points out, is itself "at odds" with the "traditional values" of "hard-work, self-denial, and family loyalty." The attack on the new class is therefore misplaced, according to Ehrenreich. The corporate elite, not the professional elite, is the only "genuine elite, relative to which the [professional] middle class is only another 'lower class.'" It is the "corporate-financial elite," moreover—especially in its frenzied search for short-term profits through mergers, acquisitions, and speculation—that "most clearly exhibits" the moral defects associated with permissiveness: "present-time orientation and the incapacity to defer gratification."

Ehrenreich's recent book on the "inner life" of the professional class, though it contains many valuable observations, shows why it is so difficult for the left to mount a convincing reply to right-wing populism and more specifically to the theory of the new class. Ehrenreich stands on firm ground as long as she argues that new class theory deflects resentment of "permissiveness" from its proper target, the corporations and their culture of consumption. Her decision to join the debate at this level, however, precludes a deeper analysis of the issues that trouble "middle Americans" and of the failure of right-wing ideology to address those issues. The right's inability to get beyond clichés about hedonism, permissiveness, and moral relativism ought to invite people on the left to give a more penetrating account of contemporary culture.

Careful attention to popular complaints about the media, for example, would suggest that people are troubled by something more elusive than "liberal bias" or sexual license. What people find disturbing about the media, it would seem, is their obsession with the young and affluent, with glamour, celebrity, money, and power; their indifference to working people and the poor, except as objects of satire or "compassion"; the prurient quality of their fascination with violence and sex; their inflated sense of their own importance; their insatiable appetite for scandal; their eagerness to uncover unworthy motives behind every worthy act; the encouragement they give to disrespect and cynicism. A number of studies have indicated that television promotes cynicism in children, and this evidence probably sums up popular uneasiness more effectively than "liberal permissiveness." People object to television because it encourages children to be too demanding, to expect too much, to equate the good life with enormous wealth, and to admire those who get something for nothing, but above all because it destroys the capacity for respect. Behind the popular attack on the media, one can sense the same kind of concerns that make the residents of South Boston, Canarsie, and Bensonhurst so anxious about threats to the racial integrity of their neighborhoods. Just as the streets have been taken over by junkies, dope peddlers, pimps, and streetwalkers, so the public airwaves appear to have been taken over by

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hustlers promoting something of the same vision of the good life, one that mocks decent people with the promise of sudden wealth and glamour.

None of this gets into Ehrenreich's account of the cultural class war. Indeed she denies the existence of such a conflict, preferring to interpret the debate about "values" as a debate confined to the new class. To admit that working people are concerned about such issues and are therefore attracted to right-wing explanations (even if those explanations prove unsatisfactory in the end) would shatter her image of militant workers steadfast in their devotion to social democracy. She therefore tries to exonerate the working class of any responsibility for the "backlash" against liberalism. This backlash, according to Ehrenreich, is a fantasy conjured up by neoconservative intellectuals. Their talk of cultural breakdown and moral anarchy finds an audience not among workers but among upper-middle-class professionals, because it plays insidiously on their "fear of falling" into self-indulgence. In the 60's, neoconservatives led the media campaign against the flower children and student radicals by depicting them as traitors to their class, which is built on discipline and self-denial. They further unnerved the new class by "discovering" working-class opposition to liberalism—another fantasy, according to Ehrenreich, but one that shook liberals' confidence in their ability to speak for Americans as a whole and thus had a deeply demoralizing effect. A "wave of contrition" swept through the new class. The "forgotten" workers came to stand "for what the [professional] class itself had lost, or always seemed to be on the verge of losing: the capacity for self-denial and deferred gratification."

The stereotype of the hard hat blinded the media to the true nature of working-class revolt, according to Ehrenreich. "For all the talk of racial backlash, black and white workers were marching, picketing, and organizing together in a spirit of class solidarity that had not been seen since the thirties." They were "wearing their hair shoulder length, smoking pot, and beginning to question the totalitarian regimen of factory life." Indeed "there was even the possibility, in the late sixties, of an explosive convergence of working-class insurgency and the student movement." The inspirational rhetoric packed into these sentences—"black and white together," "class solidarity," "the thirties," "working-class insurgency," "explosive convergence"—indicates that Ehrenreich has left the land of the living for a visit to the Marxist mortuary, where old revolutionary slogans lie beautifully embalmed. She counters one stereotype of the worker with another, the image of Archie Bunker with the image of revolutionary solidarity enshrined in the annals of the left. The second image bears no closer relation to reality than the first.

Ehrenreich's account of "yuppie guilt" is just as fanciful as her account of working-class "insurgency." The rather obscure title of her book, *Fear of Falling: The Inner Life of the Middle Class*, refers not to the fear of falling down the social ladder, but to the fear of falling away from the upper-middle-class ethic of self-denial. The professional class feels guilty about its increasing affluence, according to Ehrenreich. It has an irrational horror of "softness," which it tries to "expiate" by means of exercise and overwork. This residual puritanism makes the new class curiously receptive to ideological denunciations of itself. "The right's attack on the new class . . . rang true because it touched on the perennial fear within the professional middle class of growing soft, of failing to strive, of falling into the snares of affluence."

The left's reply to the neoconservative version of new class theory turns out to be its mirror image. For neoconservatives, the new class is the source of the attack on "traditional values." For Ehrenreich, its misguided fear of self-indulgence has made it, for the moment, the main bastion of those values. Once it overcomes its irrational need for "expiation," however, the new class can be expected to side with the "insurgent" workers in their quest for social justice. The struggle for the "soul" of the new class is still in its early stages, according to Ehrenreich. The new class has not yet decided what it wants to be, "generous or selfish, overindulged or aggrieved." If it makes the proper choices, it will become the hope of the future. Ehrenreich concludes, with the breathtaking arrogance so often found among professionals, that it has the makings of a universal class and that its "program," accordingly, should seek "to expand the class, welcoming everyone, until there remains no other class."

Neither left- nor right-wing intellectuals, strangely united in their determination to rescue the new class from itself, seem to have much interest in the rest of American society. Their view of the United States begins and ends with the knowledge industry. Other classes enter the picture only as images and stereotypes projected on the consciousness of the new class. It does not occur to these intellectuals that the rest of the country may have only a limited interest in the "soul" of the new class. Nor does it occur to them that universal access to professional status may not describe the ambitions of most Americans, much less an ideal of the good society. Ehrenreich herself acknowledges the limits of her perspective at one point. "Left and right, we are still locked in a [professional] culture that is almost wholly insular, self-referential, and, in its own way, parochial." Her book shows, however, just how difficult it is for intellectuals to break out of this comfortable confinement.

The truth about the new class, if we try to see it from the outside, is that its members, in spite of the diversity of their occupations and their political beliefs, share a common outlook, best described as a "culture of critical discourse," in the words of Alvin Gouldner. They share an inordinate respect for educational credentials, a refusal to accept anything on faith, a commitment to free inquiry, a tendency to question authority, a belief in tolerance as the supreme political virtue. At their best, these qualities describe the scientific habit of mind—the willingness to submit every idea, no matter how distasteful or attractive, to critical scrutiny and to suspend judgment until all the relevant evidence can be assessed. "Nothing is sacred to them," Gouldner wrote; "nothing is exempt from re-examination."

Gouldner's last work, *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class* (1979), remains one of the best explorations of the subject. The concept of critical discourse, unlike "hedonism," "nihilism," "permissiveness," or just plain "liberalism," is broad enough to apply to the

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new class as a whole, the scientists and technicians as well as the literary intellectuals. But Gouldner too was afflicted with new class myopia. He had no understanding of the terrible limitations of "critical discourse." The critical temper can easily degenerate into cynicism. It can degenerate into a snobbish disdain for people who lack formal education and work with their hands, an unfounded confidence in the moral wisdom of experts, an equally unfounded prejudice against untutored common sense, a distrust of any expression of good intentions, a distrust of everything but science, an ingrained irreverence, a disposition (the natural outgrowth of irreverence and distrust) to see the world as something that exists only to gratify human desires. The positive and negative features of this worldly, skeptical, and critical mentality are so closely intertwined that it is impossible to assign them, as Daniel Bell and others have tried to do, to sociologically distinct sectors of the new class — the good qualities to the scientists and technicians, the bad ones to literary intellectuals. Both the virtues and the vices of the professional class spring from the habit of criticism, which, unleavened by a sense of its own limits, soon reduces the world to ashes.

For the same reason — because the enlightened virtues carry with them a long list of enlightened vices — it is impossible to refute the core of truth in the notion of a new class by claiming that all the evils attributed to it can be blamed on capitalist consumerism instead. Capitalism cannot be absolved, but neither can it be made to carry the whole indictment of modern culture. Capitalism was itself the product, in part, of the 17th-century scientific revolution. Its material achievements rested on the technology made possible by modern science. The "spirit of capitalism," mistakenly traced by Max Weber to the Protestant ethic, derived far more directly from the sense of unlimited power conferred by science — the intoxicating prospect of man's conquest of the natural world. Scientific inquiry also served as a model for the distinctive conception of history associated with the promise of universal abundance. Just as each advance accomplished by the critical intelligence was destined to be superseded by the next, so the definition of human needs and wants was thought to expand as those needs and wants were progressively satisfied. The insatiability of curiosity and desire appeared to give the idea of progress a solid foundation in psychological and historical observation.

As the heir to the critical traditions of the scientific revolution and the Enlightenment, the new class pins its hopes on the eventual triumph of critical intelligence over superstition, cosmopolitanism over provincialism, man over nature, abundance over scarcity. Its belief in progress, chastened by 20th-century events but not yet relinquished by any means, transcends commitment to any particular system of production. We can readily agree with Gouldner's description of the professional class as the "most progressive force in modern society"; the question is whether that can still be regarded as a virtue.

Even if we ignore the unattractive features of "critical discourse" and consider it in the most genial light, we cannot escape the mounting evidence that calls its underlying premise — the limitless possibilities generated by modern science and modern production — into question. The promise of universal abundance has always contained egalitarian implications without which it would have carried very little moral authority. Those implications were open to conflicting interpretations. Some people argued that it was enough to increase the general pool of goods and services, in the expectation that everyone's standard of living would rise as a result. Others demanded more radical measures designed not merely to increase the total wealth but to distribute it more equitably. But no one who believed in progress conceived of a limit on productive capacity as a whole. No one envisioned a return to a more frugal existence; such views fell outside the progressive consensus.

The belated discovery that the earth's ecology will no longer sustain an indefinite expansion of productive forces deals the final blow to the belief in progress. A more equitable distribution of wealth, it is now clear, requires at the same time a drastic reduction in the standard of living enjoyed by the rich nations and the privileged classes. Western nations can no longer hold up their standard of living and the enlightened, critical, and progressive culture that is entangled with it as an example for the rest of the world. Nor can the privileged classes within the West — and these include the professional class as well as the very rich — expect to solve the problem of poverty by taking everyone into their own ranks. Even if this were a morally desirable solution, it is no longer feasible, since the resources required to sustain a new class style of life, hitherto imagined to be inexhaustible, are already approaching their outer limit. Under these conditions, the universalistic pretensions of the new class have to be rejected. They are not only implausible but morally offensive, not only because they embody a very narrow ideal of the good life, but because the material prerequisites for this form of the good life cannot be made universally available. ◁▷

Journal of the Plague Year

by Frederick Feirstein

At other times, a small domestic scene —
The aftermath of dinner in our country house:
My son cuddling my wife in a religious haze;
The table between us strewn with steak,
Half-drunk glasses of burgundy, a china bowl
Flecked with corn, its Vermeer spoon
Reflecting light from a Revere chandelier.
Meandering I sketch this in words
— Like an Impressionist.

Slowly our precious apparent Easter egg
Daylight purples, then succumbs to black,
And the cracked, primordial universe reveals itself.
Still, back in the kitchen, The Jefferson Starship
Lustily sing "Homeward Bound" on the radio
And a trinity of deer tiptoe
Through my apple orchard.
They watch me in my artificial light,
Confident I will let them eat their fill.

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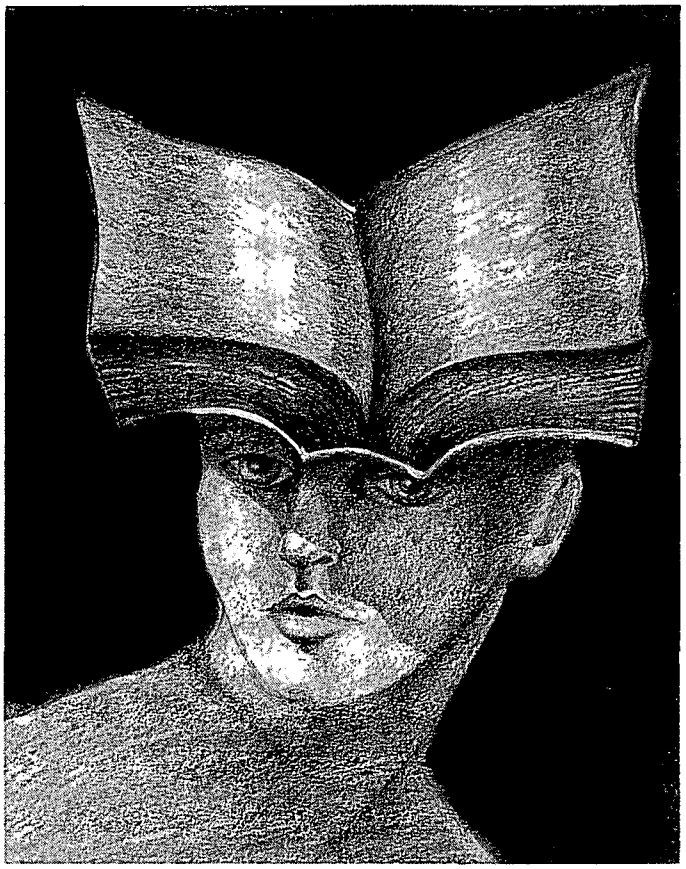
Want To Reform Public Education?

First De-fund the Department of Ed.

by Lawrence A. Uzzell



Anna Mycek-Wodecki

By now it should be obvious that "education reform" is a fraud. Its primary goal has not been to rescue children from public school malpractice, but to rescue the schools from angry parents and taxpayers.

The 1980's saw per-pupil spending climb by about one-third beyond inflation, almost entirely for doing more of the same rather than for basic changes such as decentralization. It's as if we had "reformed" the Pentagon by pumping more money into $400 toilet seats. Not surprisingly, test scores barely budged. The national average on the Scholastic Aptitude Test actually fell during the late 1980's—the very period when the supposed "reforms" were taking effect.

So we now have the results of a decade-long experiment: can federal education programs promote genuine excellence? Those in the Reagan administration who said "No" from the start, including myself, decisively lost the in-house power struggle. The winners were the bureaucratic *apparatchiki* such as Terrel Bell and the neoconservative climbers such as William Bennett.

Ten years ago the neocons seemed to have more in common with traditional conservatives than with the *apparatchiki*. After they took power their rhetoric continued to be conservative, but their actions changed: Bell and Bennett ended up with few real policy differences. Neither did more than the bare minimum for vouchers or tuition tax credits. Neither made the case that federal education programs should be pulverized not just because they cost too much but because they are bad for education.

Bennett gave brilliant speeches against the decadent policies of Stanford University and the National Education Association, but he failed to combine those speeches with concrete changes in the one bastion of decadence under his own supervision. He did not achieve a single major reform in the department's programs, budget, or regulations; he and Bell left behind a bureaucracy that still operates in pretty much the same way as when Jimmy Carter left office. Now as then, its net effect is to make schools worse.

One of the "discoveries" of contemporary social science research, confirming what observers with common sense knew all along, is that certain elements are crucial to

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effective schooling. Most schools with proven academic success share several ingredients that most unsuccessful schools lack. Those ingredients are qualitative, not quantitative: mediocre schools often spend lavishly, outstanding ones often have modest budgets. The desirable qualities are the kind that centralized government agencies cannot nurture but almost always strangle.

Effective schools have strong principals who act not as paper-pushers but as academic leaders. Their teachers have a sense of teamwork. Their halls and classrooms are orderly: teachers, students, and parents all know that discipline is taken seriously. They concentrate on the traditional academic subjects, not on fads. They reward excellence in those subjects and discourage mediocrity. They are committed to moral and intellectual values that are shared by both teachers and parents.

When the U.S. Department of Education is working normally—just quietly humming away, not making headlines—it is undermining every one of these precious qualities.

The typical public school principal in the United States has less authority today than ever before. Decisions that he used to make in consultation with teachers are now made by central district offices, state and federal agencies, and courts. Parents looking for someone to hold accountable find that the buck stops nowhere.

On some issues the Department of Education's regulation-writers openly dictate to local schools. Its Office for Civil Rights, for example, requires that schools must have coed gym classes. Its Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs pressures schools toward maximum use of languages other than English. The department enforces a total of more than one thousand pages of fine-print laws and regulations—a standing refutation of the 1950's claim that federal aid would not promote federal control.

More subtly, the very structure of the department is biased toward centralization within each state. Its programs are so numerous and so complicated that they require thousands of administrative intermediaries within the state education agencies and the central offices of local school districts. These employees are often paid directly from federal funds; their primary loyalty is to the federal programs to which they owe their jobs. In a bureaucratic "invasion of the body snatchers," the department has in effect produced 50 clones of itself in the state capitals. The average state education agency gets around half its administrative budget from Washington.

The "reform" agenda promoted by Terrel Bell and William Bennett has made these agencies even fatter. A former state bureaucrat, Bell had an incurably top-down vision of "reform"; he saw it as a collection of orders from the state capital to local officials. The preferred tool for his 1983 National Commission on Excellence in Education and its many imitators was the omnibus statute enacted by several state legislatures, including those in Florida and California, which specified more minutely than ever what local educators must and must not do. Instead of opening the schools to the stimulus of deregulation and competition, the Reagan years were spent trying to homogenize the least homogenizable of all social services.

The federal government is also an enemy of common sense in school discipline. Here the leading villains are the courts, but agencies such as the Department of Education and the Legal Services Corporation have played important supporting roles. Through rulings such as *Goss* v. *Lopez* (1975), judges have gradually legitimized the view that children have the same constitutional rights as adults. To suspend or expel a student these days is to risk a federal case; if the student sues, his lawyers can get research ammunition from the department's Office for Civil Rights and the LSC's Center for Law and Education.

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The very structure of the Department of Education is biased toward centralization within each state. Its programs are so numerous and so complicated that they require thousands of administrative intermediaries within the state education agencies and local school districts.

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The Office for Civil Rights has repeatedly pressured schools with large minority enrollments to keep detailed records of all suspensions, broken down by race and sex. The data must be available on demand to OCR's army of field inspectors. The agency's tacit assumption is that any "disparity" must be due to racism or sexism. (It is also suspicious of disparities in tracking and promotions.) One disgruntled educator told me that he was tempted to adopt a policy of "punishment by quota" to keep OCR at bay.

Discipline is not the only issue in which Washington's values clash with the values of many or most parents. Another is feminism. Here, too, the Department of Education is anything but neutral: the grant-givers at its Women's Educational Equity program and the social scientists at its Office of Educational Research and Improvement simply take it for granted that the only value worth considering is "equality." They refuse to entertain the possibility that any behavioral difference between the sexes might be caused by anything except discrimination. They use tax dollars for evangelism, subsidizing curricula and teacher-training programs designed to bring their feminist orthodoxy to a captive audience in the nation's classrooms.

Some of these grants, for example, have gone to American University's Mid-Atlantic Center for Sex Equity for the purpose of "changing teacher behavior" toward boys and girls in class. The directors of this grantee, David and Myra Sadker, believe that teachers must give absolutely equal attention to both sexes—even if their male students are more likely to act aggressively, disruptively, or in other ways that demand more attention. When one brave teacher wrote an article charging that such projects are ideologically biased, the Sadkers responded by admitting it: "What is the other side of this issue? Is it that equity is not a good idea?"

During my brief tenure at the Office of Educational Research and Improvement—which I tried to abolish—we received a grant proposal from New York University psychologist Paul Vitz, who wanted to study how public school

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textbooks treat religion. The reaction from the staff researchers was as fierce as anything I've experienced in Washington: one called the proposal the worst he had seen in his entire career. We approved it anyway, and Vitz proceeded to write what is now recognized as the definitive work on this subject. His findings have been accepted by groups ranging from the Free Congress Foundation to People for the American Way. But the bureaucrats never dropped their opposition. They even succeeded in pressuring Secretary Bennett not to publish the Vitz study. No matter how scholarly, research that treated religion as a serious social and historical reality was simply unacceptable.

The more the public schools are dominated by centralized agencies committed to such militant feminism and secularism, the more families will find themselves alienated from those schools. No matter which side is right, such ideological polarization is incompatible with the shared values and mutual trust essential for effective schooling.

Equally incompatible with such schooling is curricular faddism. Headline-obsessed Washington inevitably gets caught up in such fads: consumer education and environmental education in the 1970's, computers in the 1980's. It then helps create a climate that pressures local educators to rush into these novelties before they know enough to make intelligent decisions. Terrel Bell's "technology initiative" provided plenty of grants and contracts for well-connected consultants, but we have yet to see any proof that it made children smarter.

In 1979, when the House of Representatives agreed by a tiny margin to create a cabinet-level Department of Education, it looked like a Pyrrhic victory. The electorate clearly understood that the new department was a payoff to special interests, and Ronald Reagan's pledge to abolish it was an effective applause line on the campaign trail. A year earlier the House had actually passed tuition tax credits; it took a goal-line stand by the Carter administration to stop the bill in the Senate. After nearly two decades of steady growth in bureaucratized schooling and steady decline in academic performance, the stage was set for a counterrevolution.

The Reagan-Bush administration threw that chance away. Perhaps some future generation will recover it.

War Zone

by Frederick Feirstein

He sits on a bench, on upper Broadway
Between two lines of traffic, leaning on a cane,
His hands bruised, his eyes fierce,
His mouth pinched in disappointment.
"Did you have any trouble finding your way?"
He offers half his pastrami sandwich.
"Eat. In traffic you need a father."
"Thanks for the interview," I say.
"Why me,
An average Joe? You know, there were colorful Aces."

A wino slaps at the traffic, enters
The island, shoves his palm into the old man's
Face. "Gimme a quarter." "You want to fly?"
"Yeah." "Beat it, crud, you're strong enough to work."
He turns away and the wino threatens.
"Throw your tantrums across the street!"
The wino looks shocked, but obeys.

"Why make a film about that ancient war?"
"It was the last time we believed in heroes.
We need that today."
"We need sacrifice!"
He bangs his cane, jabs it at a hooked
Mother marching into traffic, her child
Helpless at the curb. She stalks back
And smacks it furiously across its face.

"What were you doing when the War began?"
"I cut patterns in the garment center.
I was a good student, mind you, but
My folks were broke and my brother was faster.
When he finished law school he changed his name
And moved upstate. He's gone now
—With all his fresh air, his heart was weak."

He stands, stretches his arms in blessing
Over the traffic: "Our sole purpose is to propagate.
When a plane was crippled, the pilot sometimes
Pulled out of formation to avoid hitting
The healthy ones. That would cost him his time
To bail out . . . Sure we thought of the glory
Some were afraid to be cowardly, but . . ."
He shakes his head. "You can only feel shame when
There are people around you who care."

We both look up Broadway, at the decayed
Buildings, the heavy gates across the storefronts,
The pimp cars, the old lady stepping
Through a gauntlet of potential muggers.
"I'm tired. Will you walk me home? It's getting late."

He lives above a shooting gallery. He points
To the barred window with the American flag
And gives me the Latin names for all his flowerpots.
"I would like to invite you in," he says.
"But it's sunset, and this is a war zone.
Can we meet tomorrow in traffic,
You bring the questions, I'll bring the lunch?"

"Yes sir," I say, and he salutes me,
I cross each avenue as if it is
A border.
My wife greets me at the door,
A stricken look on her face.

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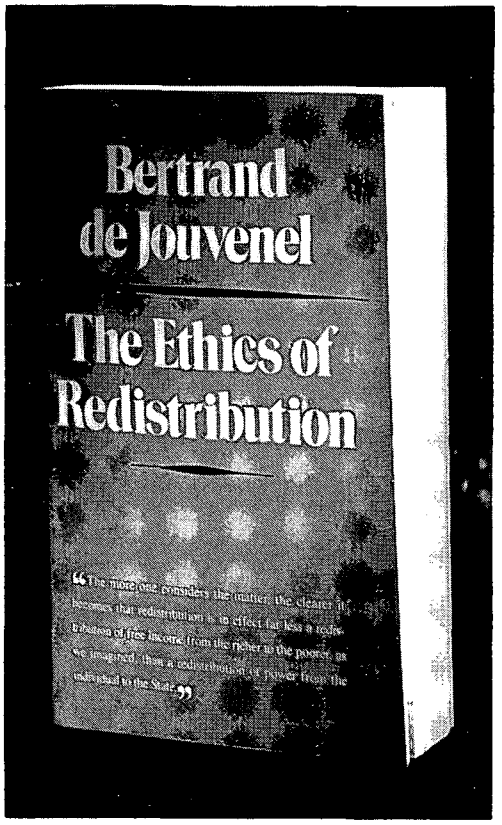

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Anna Mycek-Wodecki

La Pasionaria of the Beltway

by Jeffrey Hart

"Even a child is known by his doings."
—Proverbs 20:11

What I Saw at the Revolution
by Peggy Noonan
New York: Random House;
353 pp., $19.95

◆

This book is at once a strange object and a peculiar event. To touch on the latter for a moment, it was excerpted before publication in the *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, which chose with an unerring eye those passages most damaging to Ronald Reagan and his administration. Using those same passages, Reagan-loathers such as Joan Didion and Wilfrid Sheed much enjoyed themselves in print. Yet Noonan's book does contain many other passages expressing a kaleidoscope of attitudes toward Reagan, many of them highly favorable. One reflects, however, that Noonan must have approved of the selection published in the *Times*, corrected the galleys, and so forth. She is smart enough to have known what the *Times* was up to. Why did she put up with it? To get her face on the cover of the *Times Magazine*? Was this, in the famous words of Orwell's parody, another case of "Under the spreading chestnut tree, / I sold you, and you sold me?" Is personal publicity really the ultimate value for Peggy Noonan?

But before we return to the subject of this book as an event, let us consider it as an object, about which a great many things can be said.

One experiences in *What I Saw at the Revolution* an extreme discontinuity; the book is like a smashed mirror. To change metaphors, it reads as if its author had had a dozen errant bowling balls colliding constantly between her ears while it was in composition. The text seethes with contradictory resentments. Noonan's background, about which we learn much more than is interesting, was lower-middle-class. While standing on that particular platform she does her populist routine, a kind of public hate (to borrow from Orwell again) against the smooth types and "Harvardheads" who surrounded her at the White House. But there are also moments when she expresses deep loathing of the culture in which she was raised.

> [The men] are not wearing their uniforms—for this one is a conductor on the Long Island Rail Road and that one is a cop in the city and this one is a foreman at Grumman—but are dressed in stiff khaki slacks and a zippered jacket from when they were in Korea. Their skin is blue-white. They look soft and lost without their uniforms.

I suppose the reader will wonder whether their skin was really "blue-white," though perhaps there is something strange about the drinking water in Noonan's hometown of Massapequa. Anyway, there is worse to come:

Jeffrey Hart is a senior editor at National Review, *a nationally syndicated columnist, and the author of a number of books, the most recent of which is* Acts of Recovery.

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> And everyone had *Reader's Digest* Condensed Books and read them and the women had coffee klatches late in the morning and there was a round of swirl of Entenmann's coffee cake and they would leave deep red lipstick marks on the coffee cups and they wore pedal pushers and bounced babies on their freckled knees and gossiped about . . . what?

Those red lipstick marks and those freckled knees perfectly express Noonan's loathing, adding just the extra touch to the other details of her own . . . *superiority*.

The amount of loathing in this book is extraordinary, perhaps even pathological, and it is always expressed in terms of taste or aesthetics: "Wherever the president was his top staff was. They'd sit there in a row in his office like frogs on a log." And here is Noonan's (quite clever) mockery of her White House colleagues, expressed in a parody of their lingo:

> You had a notion instead of a thought and a dustup instead of a fight, you had a can-do attitude and you were in touch with the zeitgeist [sic]. No one had intentions they had an agenda and no one was wrong they were fundamentally wrong and you didn't work on something you broke your pick on it and it wasn't an agreement it was a done deal.

That is pretty funny, and recognizable, but not exactly dripping with charity and fellowship. It is in the mode of Flaubert's *Bouvard and Pecuchet*, if one wishes to compare the great with the microscopic.

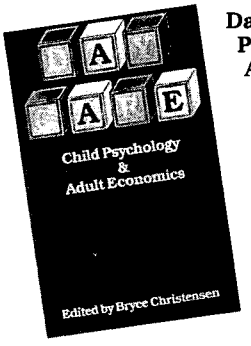
The comparison with Flaubert reminds me of another peculiar quality of Noonan's book, with its range of reference to movie and TV figures. She has read Hemingway and even thinks Thomas Wolfe was a good writer, but she much more comfortably refers for illustration and comparison to pop-cult figures who are at best marginal to the adult consciousness. As she herself puts it, "No one has lived for and been immersed in the ephemera of the entertainment era like my generation." Speak for yourself, Peggy. Reading her prose is like taking Eliot's *Waste Land*, subtracting the allusions to Dante and Shakespeare and the rest, and substituting references to Johnny Carson and Robert Redford. The reader experiences a sort of cultural decompression.

It must also be said that *What I Saw at the Revolution* is the most narcissistic item to come along since Milton's Eve gazed at her kisser in the reflecting water and decided that she was beautiful. The repetition of the pronoun "I" sounds at first like hailstones on a tin roof and finally, from relentless repetition, like machine-gun bullets hitting a wall. The shift from ice to hot lead occurred to this reader as early as page six:

> I was so swept away that when my fifth-grade teacher, Miss Scott, told my mother I didn't do my homework, I explained, seriously, that I was too busy with the [Kennedy] campaign.

This degree of self-regard is always on the threshold of *taking offense*:

> A few weeks later I was walking through the East Wing when I saw the first lady and her entourage coming my way. I'd never met her and didn't know if I was supposed to look at her and make eye contact and say hello or leave her to her privacy, of which she had not had much these many years. I decided to look to see if I could see anything interesting in her eyes. She looked at me in a way that seemed to have no meaning. Then she looked down at what I was wearing which was, unfortunately, a wrinkled khaki



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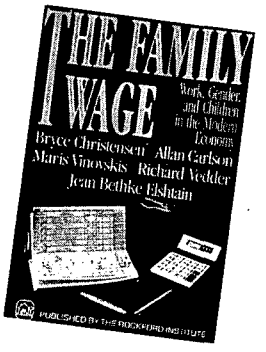

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> skirt and a blue workshirt and heavy walking shoes with white woolen socks. Not exactly White House issue, but I was going walking. She looked me up and down and I swear her mouth curled. She looked away and said something to an aide. The next time I saw her I hid behind a pillar.

Count these personal pronouns. Wonder about that attire. Meditate upon the thoughts and emotions attributed to Nancy Reagan. And what are we to make of Noonan's presumption in judging that Mrs. Reagan had "no meaning" in her eyes?

Of course, given this narcissistic sensibility, nothing is ever good enough for Peggy Noonan. Like most people who work in "The White House," she actually was installed in the old Executive Office Building. *Not good enough*:

> They gave me an office that faced a courtyard that never got the sun. I could look out and see the exhaust system of the EOB. An old radiator hissed forlornly, carrying into my office the metallic rumblings of the deepest insides of the old Victorian building. It was dank and clanked.

Yet the old Executive Office Building was good enough for Secretary of State Cordell Hull and for Secretary of the Navy Franklin Roosevelt, and it's a helluva long way from Massapequa.

Though there can be no doubt that Noonan possesses some talent as a speechwriter, still she is not favorably recalled by her colleagues. She claims to have originated George Bush's "thousand points of light" phrase; others, however, trace it to an article in *Crisis* magazine. They dispute, too, her claim to the words Reagan bestowed on the Challenger catastrophe. Now, most official speeches result from a collaboration and are not ordinarily the work of a single ghost. The bad feelings among her former colleagues come from the fact that Noonan, in leaks to the media, imperialistically claimed personal authorship.

What I Saw at the Revolution is, in major aspect, novelistic: "Bill Bennett, who walks in thinking Holy smokes, I'm in the White House. I am a member of the Cabinet of the United States, holy smokes!" And for its fictional aspect, this book should have been signed "Peggy Brontë." Its pervasive plot amounts to "Reagan didn't love me," which becomes rather embarrassing, as when Peggy Noonan writes, "there was a childlike quality to his robust self-regard, an innocence even to his sin." To his *what*? The only Reagan "sin" to be documented in the book is Reagan's insufficient appreciation of you-know-who:

> He was at his desk. He came toward me warm as ever; he hardly seemed aged. Does he remember me? I think so but am not sure.

Mr. Rochester, please call your office. There is a message from Miss Eyre.

And the following must be about the strangest conversation ever to have taken place in the Oval Office. In it, Noonan is questioning the President of the United States:

> "Do you ever feel like the boy in the bubble?"
>
> "Who was that?"
>
> "The boy who had no immune system, so he had to live in a plastic bubble where he could see everyone and they could see him, but there was something between him and the people, the plastic. He couldn't touch them."
>
> "Well, no."

At least in part of her disordered mind, Reagan does not measure up to Noonan's idea of presidential greatness: "Where is the anguish that usually comes with greatness?"

Well, to hell with the anguish. Let Paul Muni play the Reagan part. It occurs to the reader that George Washington, though often angry, was never, so far as we know, "anguished." No, Reagan simply does not measure up for Noonan. No anguish.

And yet, as a youngish conservative, she does admire Reagan's undoubted accomplishments, as in the following weird sentence:

> And Reagan? I knew he'd done more good for our country in six years than any president since Roosevelt.

But wait a minute: just what were Roosevelt's accomplishments? Certainly not ending the Depression; the war did that. Historians are somewhat at a loss to delineate FDR's "greatness." I can only suppose that Peggy Noonan is talking not about the historical Franklin Roosevelt, but about some movie or TV version of him.

But though she deems Reagan to have accomplished much, there are moments when her unrequited love—or her desperate need to be noticed and appreciated—turns to fury:

> There were times when I would see the earnest young people in the middle levels of the administration trying to get someone to listen to their thoughts, fighting to advance ideas that were not country club [sic] but human and compassionate, and see the sunny president who did not seem to know or notice, and I would think to myself (if I was tired enough, frustrated enough) that the battle for the mind of Ronald Reagan was like the trench warfare of World War I: Never have so many fought so hard for such barren terrain.

This spasm has as its premise the notion that Reagan did not have a mind of his own, that he had to be instructed by people like Noonan. In actuality, Reagan possessed several large and clear ideas, and had possessed them since he decided to enter active politics more than forty years ago.

Today, Peggy Noonan is *persona non grata* at the Bush White House, and for good reason. She may be the worst thing to have passed within the pearly gates since the palmy days of Gordon Liddy and John Dean. Her exploitation of her minor role in the Reagan administration is regarded by professionals as an unprincipled outrage, a gross violation of the code of the speechwriter, which insists that the said writer submit to being a spectral one: the speech belongs to the public figure who delivers it. In his review of *What I Saw at the Revolution*, another former speechwriter, Aram Bakshian, observed that while on the job Noonan had a "canine" hunger for publicity. She courted the press, leaked her speech assignments, and determinedly

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became a Beltway media star. As former LBJ speechwriter Ben Wattenberg has written by way of lampooning her, "Extra: Extra: President to read Glotz's speech tonight." Now we learn that the speech was not always by "Glotz." ("Glotz" was the first presidential speechwriter to star in an *Esquire* celebrity profile, legs over a couch arm, thus providing what was apparently the last straw for then Chief of Staff Don Regan.)

"There was terrible bad blood in the speechwriters' shop at the White House." Thus, in a note to me, wrote an official by far superior in rank to Noonan at the time. Not surprisingly, a publicity monger like Noonan had plenty of non-admirers in the West Wing, and in this book she returns their loathing with interest. By contrast, my own experience as a speechwriter was one of immense camaraderie: we wrote speeches for Reagan or Nixon and went out for beers. But Peggy Noonan was not a player on those teams.

When an editorial in *National Review* sternly criticized her for violating the anonymity code of the professional speechwriter, a former member of the profession (and one who was, by the way, much more significant in it than Noonan) wrote to me personally as follows:

> Rumor has it that you authored the *National Review* piece *re* Peggy Noonan's book. If so, you should know that more than a few people believe you are right on target.
>
> More than one reporter has remarked to me that nothing like this phenomenon of self-promotion has been seen before — even acknowledging that speechwriters are a more prominent lot than they used to be.
>
> You — and they — are right. In any event, you've said the empress has no clothes. Don't expect any parades in your honor.

After the editorial appeared, Peggy Noonan's Beltway claque went bananas. Whether Noonan has clothes or not, she obviously remains an empress for at least some Washington conservatives.

It remains only to add that the narcissistic photograph of Noonan printed on the dust jacket of this book inescapably reminds this reader of Jack Nicholson at his typewriter in *The Shining*.

Daydreaming

by Frederick Feirstein

You contemplate a European lake
Where picnickers enact a comedy
Of Aryan romance: an ingenue

Eludes a subtle pass a soldier makes;
A chunky salesman, drunk and oniony,
Gooses a widow as she's dishing stew.

You're spooning chocolate mousse or German cake,
Enjoying temporary sanity.
You see the agony awaiting you,

The nightmare when the 20th Century wakes
Amidst the litter of this bourgeoisie.
You see this as an analyst and Jew.

It doesn't matter what discoveries you make
About the psyche and its history.
Time and the world will have its way with you.

Yet, for a moment, the future is opaque.
You're laughing with your living family.
The day is sunny and the lake is blue.

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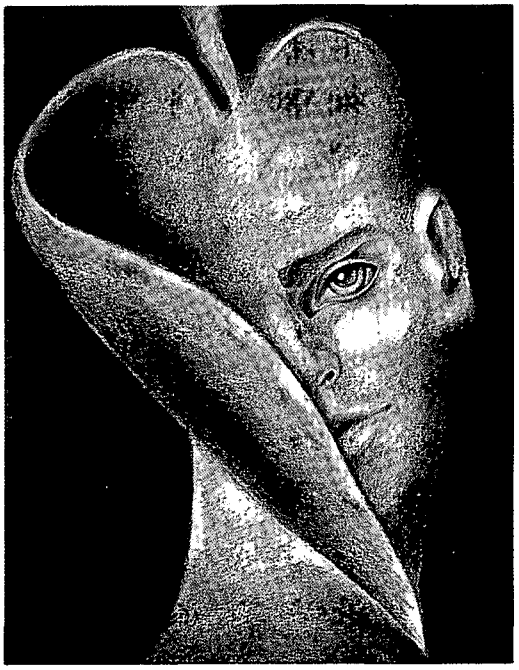
Edward Abbey: R.I.P.

by Wayne Lutton

"By retaining one's love of such things as trees, fishes, butterflies and toads, one makes a peaceful and decent future a little more probable."
—George Orwell



Anna Mycek-Wodecki

Hayduke Lives!
by Edward Abbey
Boston: Little, Brown and Company;
308 pp., $18.95

◆

With the death of Edward Abbey, aged 62, in March of last year, the Western portion of what once was really the *United* States lost her greatest defender of the post-World War II era. And Americans everywhere—but especially those whose Anglo-Saxon heritage is not for them a cause for guilt-ridden anxiety—lost one of their most courageous spokesmen. For during a time when liberalism and conservatism have become virtually indistinguishable from each other, here was a writer with a growing audience who combined the profoundly old-fashioned American values of fierce independence and respect for the natural environment with isolation in foreign affairs. Edward Abbey was part Thoreau and Lysander Spooner—with a heavy infusion of John T. Flynn and Charles Lindbergh. Born and raised on a farm in northern Appalachia, he hitchhiked in his late teens throughout the West and in 1947, after military service in Italy, returned to the Southwest, where he spent the remaining 42 years of his life.

Classified—and often simply dismissed—as a "nature" writer, Abbey studied philosophy at the University of New Mexico. And although no author of recent decades was better able to give his readers a feel for the flora and fauna, the arid deserts and distant mountains of the West, he wrote novels and essays that have little to do with biological science. Rather, in them Abbey expanded upon some of his lifelong concerns: unquestioned economic growth that leaves the landscape—as well as most people—worse off in the long run; the so-called stewardship practiced by those state and federal agencies responsible for the management and preservation of our park and wilderness areas ("They want the whole West to look like an Illinois cornfield . . . Keep that old raw cranky smelly unpredictable Mother Nature where she belongs, namely in a zoo. Or a museum. Under glass and behind nice neat paved nature trails"); and the conflict between individuals who are content to mind their own business and the institutions of the state—any state—that demand discipline and reward conformity. But it was as a writer of fiction that Abbey wanted to be most appreciated. Through the use of poetic symbols—lonely cowboys, embattled ranchers, ruined cities—he hoped to dramatize his concerns. And, like so many authors, he dreamed of writing a *magnum opus*, an Abbeyesque *War & Peace;* a "fat masterpiece" of at least a thousand pages—a wish that remained unfulfilled at his death.

In the half-dozen novels that he did write, Abbey managed poignantly to convey his dismay over the direction America had taken. Once a country

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Wayne Lutton has spent most of the past twenty-five years in the West and Southwest. His most recent book is Buying Open Borders, *to be published this summer by the Capital Research Center.*

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that respected individuals and provided them with a relatively safe and secure place in which to live, the United States had devolved into an increasingly unsafe, unhealthy, and uglified territory dominated by technocrats ruling over a neurotic, dependent, and eviscerated populace. All of these themes are explored in Abbey's first successful novel, *The Brave Cowboy* (1956), which served as the basis for the film *Lonely Are the Brave* (and netting for Ed Abbey all of $7,500), and which is now regarded as a classic of Western literature. In this tale a modern cowboy, Jack Burns (who later turns up in *Hayduke Lives!* and *Good News*), refuses to bow to the dictates of postwar America and tries to free a friend who has been incarcerated for failing to carry a draft registration card. His friend, however, refuses to be rescued, and the cowboy, after escaping from the county jail, is pursued through the desert and into the mountains by a posse equipped with walkie-talkies, machine guns, and helicopters. Readers of *The Brave Cowboy* may be reminded of B. Traven, an author whose work—*The Death Ship* in particular—Abbey much admired.

During the late 1950's and 60's, Abbey spent part of his time working as a seasonal ranger and fire-lookout at parks throughout the West. This afforded him the opportunity to explore the great landscape and the time to develop his thoughts. His next novel, *Fire on the Mountain* (1962), received a measure of critical acclaim and was later turned into a well-received TV movie. It is another "serious" Western, which pits an aging rancher, John Vogelin, against the U.S. government. The Defense Department wants to seize the family homestead to use it as an Air Force missile test range. Like Jack Burns, Vogelin fights a losing battle against the forces of the New America. In Abbey's novels the good guys do not ride triumphantly into the sunset: instead, they are crushed by the state, though retaining a measure of their personal dignity.

Abbey's last serious novel to be set in the West was *Good News* (1980). It is a futuristic work in which the degraded survivors of a once proud and prosperous nation are reduced to scavenging for food and shelter amid the ruins of a metropolis. In this post-*Bladerunner* world a few men and women try to rebuild a new society that honors the values that had been discarded by a people who had embraced "growth" regardless of the foreseeable costs.

The Fool's Progress (1988) was the first Abbey novel not to have the West as the primary scene of its action. It is thinly disguised autobiography, in which Henry Lightcap relates his journey from Tucson back to the family home in West Virginia. Through a series of flashbacks, Lightcap reflects on the course his life has taken and comments aciduously and often uproariously on everything from music (Abbey loved Beethoven and Bruckner, among others, and dismissed rock as the product of an "imitation Afro-Urban-industrial freeway culture") to feminism and religion (Lightcap scorns the effeminate image of "Christ as the Bearded Lady"), Mexican cultural achievements ("murals, manslaughter, and beer"), Indians (there are too many of them), and Third World immigration:

> What we really have to worry about . . . are not the Russkies but the Southerners. I mean Latin America, Asia, Africa. Those people are breeding like fruit flies. . . . Their boat is overloaded, sinking. They are already climbing into our boat by the millions. And they don't stop breeding when they get here. Soon enough, maybe by the year 2000, life in America will be degraded to the level of life in Mexico. Assuming present trends continue. And who, my friend, is making any effort to change these trends? . . . Our troubles are not political, they are biological.

In fact, *The Fool's Progress* is less a genuine novel than it is a device through which the author can deliver speeches on various issues he had addressed (often more persuasively) in his essays. As much as we may share Abbey's concerns and sympathize with his outlook, for those of us who are already familiar with some of his other work there is something unsatisfactory about this nearest approximation to the unwritten "fat masterpiece" of the novelist's dream.

Abbey's most popular work of fiction was *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (1975). It is a comic novel in which The Gang—comprised of Doc Sarvis, his Brooklyn-born young mistress, Bonnie Abbzug, their guide Seldom Seen Smith (seldom seen by his three Mormon wives, that is), and George Washington Hayduke, a former Green Beret—roam the canyonlands of Utah and Arizona, burning down billboards, yanking up survey stakes, pouring Karo syrup into the fuel tanks of bulldozers, snipping barbed wire fences, and dynamiting a coal train. Before they are able to pull off their ultimate caper, the blowing up of Glen Canyon dam—that monument to Development with a capital D that, as has since been confirmed, accomplished in nature what the firebombing of the Louvre and the National Gallery would accomplish in the world of art—Hayduke falls through a firestorm of bullets into a slickrock canyon, and the other Monkey Wrenchers are arrested by the *Polizei*.

Hayduke Lives! is the long-awaited sequel to *The Monkey Wrench Gang*; the author and his wife, Clarke, had just finished correcting the proofs at the time of his death. The posthumous work apparently was not intended to be the final installment, but rather "the further adventures of" George Hayduke (who is modeled, like the Gang's other members, on a living person whose identity the author never publicly disclosed). In what will be perforce their last adventure, the Gang is reassembled to tackle GOLIATH—the first Giant Earth Mover (G.E.M.) of Arizona. Standing 67 feet high, weighing 13 and a half thousand tons, and costing nearly $40 million, GOLIATH is a dragline excavator designed for digging open pits the size of Lake Titicaca. Flanked by Gog and Magog, as the escorting pair of Mitsubishi trucks are dubbed, the Super-G.E.M. is going to be used to help "develop" Lost Eden Canyon, a pristine patch of land along the Utah-Arizona border. Uranium has been found in them thar mesas. And once "maximum financial return" has been extracted from the ground—as state law requires—developers envision erecting a complex complete with deluxe hotel, championship golf course, and a condo village for the 50,000 people who can afford a

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desert view from their decks. A packed public hearing gives official endorsement to the project, and protestors at the site are dispersed by the state and federal constabulary, making yet another part of the great American outdoors safe for economic growth. But, like Igor and Frankenstein's Monster —or Robin Hood, if you prefer— Hayduke lives, and has returned with his allies to take on the fast-buck developers, tourist operators, and political manipulators. Most readers will hope that, this time, Hayduke & Company finally get away with it. In any event, they will undoubtedly be led to ponder (as does Orval Jensen, one of GOLIATH's operators) whether our economic health really requires the eventual commercial exploitation of every piece of as-yet undeveloped land. As for Abbey, his belief was that it isn't a case of Nature or people, but rather of Nature *and* people.

Although he preferred to be known as a novelist, it was as a writer of essays on travel, ideas, people, places, and adventures that Abbey excelled. The lonely cry of a hawk, a stream bubbling over rocks, the wind whispering through canyons, the magnificent solitude of the desert, viewing the Grand Canyon for the first time, or taking a final rafting expedition down the Colorado River before a dam drowned many of its most precious sites — these are some of the things that Abbey rendered so well, and with so much clarity and forcefulness. And, yes, he would — in what became an Abbey trademark — sprinkle his descriptions with observations on the social and political topics he was most concerned with. In these he comes across not as some right-wing crank, which he wasn't in any event, but rather as a representative for values that were once widely shared in this country, and which contributed to making the American Republic something of a success — at least before the onset of the 20th century.

Desert Solitaire (1968) was his first nonfiction best-seller and is regarded by many critics and readers as his finest book. It is an account of his three seasons spent as a ranger at Arches National Monument near Moab, Utah. In it, Abbey takes us on his hikes through the desert and on that memorable last trip down the Colorado before the dam builders flooded Glen Canyon and created the huge stagnant pond known today as Lake Foul (Powell). In it, too, Abbey inveighs against the dehumanization of what he called "Industrial Tourism" and pauses to reflect on "the wretched inhabitants of city and plain . . . can we even think of them, to be perfectly candid, as members of the same race?" *Desert Solitaire* is not to be mistaken for a tour book, since, as he pointed out, "most of what I write about . . . is gone or going under fast." It is instead "an elegy. A memorial. You're holding a tombstone in your hands."

The Journey Home: Some Words in Defense of the American West (1977), *Abbey's Road: Take the Other* (1979), *Down the River* (1982), *Beyond the Wall* (1984), and *One Life at a Time, Please* (1988) are the other collections of his essays, and all of them contain gems. It was in these essays that Abbey presented most effectively his views on the relationship between man and the natural masterpieces that surround him. Contrary to the impression some critics had of him, Edward Abbey was no misanthrope who preferred rocks and scorpions to humans. Far from it. He was a man who clearly enjoyed the company of his friends and who wished well for other people. What he seemed most to despair of was the relentless drive to regulate all mankind and to despoil our remaining "undeveloped" areas. There is an honesty expressed in his work that one rarely encounters in these days when, as in Oliver Goldsmith's era, speech is used not to express thoughts but to conceal them.

Through his essays and novels, Abbey sought to share his love for the American West with his readers and to awaken a sense of awe, and of wonderment. He tried to provoke readers to reconsider what has become of our country and what it yet may be. He wrote in his essay "The Conscience of the Conqueror" (included in *Abbey's Road*):

> America offers what may be our final opportunity to save a useful sample of the original land. It is not a question merely of preserving forests and rivers, wildlife and wilderness, but also of keeping alive a certain way of human life, a wholesome and reasonable balance between industrialism and agrarianism, between cities and small towns, between private property and public property. Here it is still possible to enjoy the advantages of contemporary technological culture without having to endure the overcrowding and stress characteristic of this culture in less fortunate regions . . . Perhaps in the decades to come we can . . . restore to all citizens of our nation their rightful heritage of breathable air, drinkable water, open space, family-farm agriculture, a truly democratic political economy. Why settle for anything less? . . . It will be the job of another generation of thinkers and doers to keep that hope alive and bring it closer to reality . . . We may succeed in making America . . . an example to other nations of what is possible and beautiful. Was that not, after all, the whole point and purpose of the American adventure?

LIBERAL ARTS

SIX-PACK POLITICS

. . . Just two years ago, during our last congressional election, our politicians promised not to raise our taxes. But these same politicians had the foresight to create a special "commission" to make unpopular recommendations on tax increases.

Congress set the pace. They *repealed* taxes on fur coats, expensive jewelry and the sale of stocks and bonds.

Now, they say they must raise taxes on your beer by at least 300%.

. . . You remember when I played baseball for the St. Louis Cardinals. Then, I dealt with men who said what they meant and meant what they said.

. . . I've had enough! Many of the nation's largest and most profitable corporations pay nothing in taxes. It's just not fair to single beer drinkers out for higher taxes.

With your help, I'm going to do something about it!

—from a recent newsletter by Stan Musial, honorary chairman of Beer Drinkers of America

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Dancing Man

by Russell Kirk

From Eden to Babylon: The Social and Political Essays of Andrew Nelson Lytle
Edited and Introduced by M.E. Bradford
Washington: Regnery Gateway; 290 pp., $19.95

◆

A few months past there came to visit us for a weekend, at our house in the backwoods, Mr. Andrew Lytle, man of letters, aged 87 years. Although there are not many big houses farther north than ours, and although Mr. Lytle is very much a man of the South, he felt at home here. For, as he writes in his essay "The Backwoods Progression" (first published in 1933), the American backwoods "is the one feature, along with pioneering, that is common to the different sections of this no longer commonly-minded country."

Mr. Lytle, despite having seen the defeat of the South and the secularizing of what once was Christendom, remains wonderfully cheerful. In his youth, as he says, he was "a dancing man," and an actor. He dances in conversation still. Novelist, essayist, critic, and for years editor of *The Sewanee Review*, that best of literary quarterlies, Andrew Lytle is the last living member of that circle of social and literary men called the Southern Agrarians. (This well-edited collection includes his piece "They Took Their Stand: The Agrarian View After Fifty Years," first published in 1980.) His father's plantation of Cornsilk, twelve hundred acres "which the T.V.A. stole and covered up with water," is long sunk out of sight; but the wit and wisdom of Lytle will not be easily drowned, New York's reviewers notwithstanding.

"The appearance of *From Eden to Babylon* reminds us that there is another American conservatism, one which the Framers would have recognized." So writes M.E. Bradford in his introduction to this lively volume; he contrasts Lytle's political imagination with the views of alleged conservatives who are "centralizers and egalitarians on every subject but money." Lytle speaks for the old America, and what remains of it today, in which "The Small Farm Secures the State"—an essay of his first published in 1936. As Bradford continues, "The virtue of private property is not wealth but its capacity to resist Leviathan and to secure the 'peace of the family.' Because of Southerners like Andrew Lytle, *this* understanding of conservatism still survives among us in a dark, utilitarian time."

Lytle's social and political principles were expressed at the beginning of the 19th century by John Taylor of Caroline; and his essay (first published in the long-vanished *American Review*, back in 1934) on that Virginian planter-writer is the most illuminating piece ever written about Taylor. Here is the thesis, in Lytle's words:

> The early republican leaders of the Revolution had manoeuvred to make the Union a medium pliable but strong enough to generate such well-being. It was understood by these men that private property must be generally distributed throughout the body politic; otherwise the state is corrupted by its core and is destroyed by the very agency which, with better luck, would have given it life. They failed—but not until after a long and bitter fight. Their failure is our tragedy, for it has robbed posterity of its inheritance. Now there is everywhere such general discontent, so much criticism of those who have transferred to their aimless use the energies of millions of people, that all earnestly look for a way out.

Therefore Lytle resurrected Taylor of Caroline, "a gentleman who exerted his talents and strength to oppose the trend taken by American affairs." A similar impulse and motive moved this reviewer, 17 years later than Lytle, to raise up from the grave Taylor's eloquent ally, John Randolph of Roanoke.

Taylor denounced the "Paper-and-Patronage Aristocracy" that arose after the War of 1812; Lytle reproaches the 20th-century equivalent of that urban industrial and financial web. But he knows that our tribulations of today are not industrial and political merely: he is one of the more moving Christian men of letters of this century. In "A Christian University and the Word" (his Founder's Day address at the University of the South in 1964), he upholds the Christian understanding of social order:

> The world's plight is so precarious that we can not survive without a return to order and for us this can only be Christian order. Christendom was not a commonwealth; it was a god's wealth. The king was God's secular overseer; the bishop His spiritual. . . . The castle and cathedral stood for every eye to see, symbols both of physics and metaphysics. This entire order was held together, in the right order of relationship, by the Word, the eternal Word, for God said "Before Abraham was, I am," that is to say, I am pure being, pure creation, which is forever. The Word was God in His Creative function. . . . A Christian university can begin to restore to language its meaning: first by definition which defines, makes more accurate the vocabulary of the various branches of learning, keeping them in their right order and relationships. This is the beginning of recovery, for without knowledge there can be no apprehension of the divine creative promise of the Word. There are words still with symbolic lustre, like sine and cosine, and honor.

As historian and biographer, Mr. Lytle is spirited. His essays on Lee, Calhoun, and especially General Nathan Bedford Forrest are calculated to

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convert practically anybody into a Southern partisan. The picture of the typical Southern family farm in his famous essay "The Hind Tit"—that farm before industrialization—is marvelously winning; it tempts this northern reviewer to taste sallet, or turnip greens.

Andrew Nelson Lytle does not despair. "The South may well become the salvation of this country yet, both at home and abroad," he writes in "How Many Miles to Babylon" (first published in 1953). "Private property, controlled by the proprietor, may be the only restraining influence to remind us that the great corporate business has something private about it. The time will come, otherwise, when it will seem more efficient for the state to take over."

The South has become the backwoods of centralized industrial America—though deprived, for the most part, of the old backwoods physical setting of forests, Indians, wild animals, and treacherous rivers. And yet the Southern backwoodsmen remain potentially powerful; and the Southern states may have "enough form left to shake off their lethargy when the walls of steel and concrete tumble down upon our heads; when the electric webs break loose from their poles to dart and sting like scorpions."

Like Nathan Bedford Forrest, Andrew Lytle charges undismayed the outnumbering regiments of paper and patronage. He is of the number of those who take heaven by storm.

Russell Kirk lives in Mecosta, Michigan.

Another Life of C.S. Lewis

by Lyle W. Dorsett

C.S. Lewis: A Biography
by A.N. Wilson
New York and London:
W.W. Norton & Company;
334 pp., $22.50

◆

In 1949 Chad Walsh, at that time an obscure poet and literary critic at Beloit College in Wisconsin, published the first book on C.S. Lewis. Entitled *C.S. Lewis: Apostle to the Sceptics*, this long out-of-print volume is still one of the best books written on the subject. In the forty years since Walsh established himself as an authority on Lewis, over fifty books have been published on the Belfast-born, Oxford-educated author who died in November 1963, the same day President Kennedy was assassinated. Unfortunately, most of those subsequently published books are not as good as the first one. Walsh, to be sure, had the advantage of being first in print. But more than that, he was a superb stylist, an able critic, and he knew Lewis. The burden of every author to walk in Walsh's path has been to say something new.

Nevertheless, in four decades some original contributions have been made to our knowledge of Lewis. The author of nearly forty books, Lewis still had 14 years to live after Walsh's book was published. Furthermore, the celebrated Englishman wrote some of his most important books during the 1950's and early 1960's.

The first full-scale biography to appear after Lewis's death appeared in 1974. This useful volume was written by a close friend, Roger Lancelyn Green, a well-established freelance writer, and Walter Hooper, a man who at the time was an obscure American who had spent a few weeks doing some secretarial chores for Lewis in 1963.

Warren H. Lewis, Lewis's older brother, had authorized the volume done by Green and Hooper. Before Warren Lewis's death, however, he expressed concern that Hooper would make himself out to be a close friend and confidant of the Lewis brothers—especially Jack (as C.S. Lewis was called by all his friends). Hooper barely knew C.S. Lewis, but one would never think so from reading the book. Indeed, Roger Lancelyn Green told me a few years ago that the one thing he would change about the book if he could redo it would be to make clear that Hooper's relationship with Jack was brief and superficial. Green said he did not see the draft of the last portion of the book before it went to press. Warren Lewis died before it was published, so he never saw in print what he predicted would happen.

Hooper's curious desire to depict himself as Lewis's close friend notwithstanding, the book he and Green did was the standard work on Lewis's life and writing until the 1980's. Not until 1986 did a new full-scale life of Lewis appear. This one was written by William Griffin, an editor for two decades, first at Harcourt Brace Jovanovich and later at Macmillan. During those years Griffin acquired and edited numerous books of Lewisiana, thereby establishing himself as an expert in the field. Now the religious books editor for *Publishers Weekly*, Griffin, also an able novelist and playwright, wrote a biography entitled *Clive Staples Lewis: A Dramatic Life*. This immense book of nearly five hundred pages is well written, and it has the unique quality of letting Lewis speak for himself. An author of remarkable restraint, Griffin doggedly refuses to pass judgment on Lewis, his friends and associates. Letting the famous writer speak for himself, Griffin quotes countless letters, diaries, and books. Ultimately the Lewis we see is one Lewis wanted us to see.

Not every student of Lewis studies was satisfied with Griffin's original but aloof approach. Therefore when *Jack: C.S. Lewis and His Times* by George Sayer appeared in 1988, it was eagerly picked up by those who had read Lewis's works but yearned to get a closer look at the man. Sayer—Lewis's close friend for thirty years—wrote a book that made Lewis come alive for those who never knew him. Full of Sayer's keen insights, as well as rich quotations from his correspondence with Lewis, this book is at once a personal memoir, an in-depth biography, and a work of insightful literary criticism. In brief, it is a superb book and eminently worthy of its subject.

Because *Jack* is such a splendid book, many people will be puzzled as to why we need another biography two years later. The answer to that question is easy. Sayer's book has all of the strengths of being written by an intelli-

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gent man who knew Lewis well. But there is a certain myopia that comes from such a perspective, too. Furthermore, as is well-known, some major primary sources have become available to serious researchers since Sayer finished the first draft of his book. For example, over two thousand volumes from C.S. Lewis's personal library — many complete with his incisive marginal notes — were acquired and made available by the Marion E. Wade Center at Wheaton College in Illinois. Approximately fifty oral history interviews that contain the reminiscences of some of Lewis's closest friends and associates are available at the Wade Center as well. Added to these treasures are Joy Davidman Lewis's (his wife) letters, which are now open to the public, as well as many letters written by Lewis's brother, Warren. Warren's diaries — complete with major portions never published — were also opened to researchers after Sayer completed his book.

When word reached us that A.N. Wilson was under contract to do a Lewis biography, I was delighted. Wilson is one of the most intelligent writers and gifted stylists of our time, who has made some important contributions to the genre of biography with his books on Hilaire Belloc, John Milton, and Leo Tolstoy.

To my utter dismay and great disappointment, Wilson spent less than three hours in the Marion E. Wade Center. Though his book will leave the reader with the impression that he knows Wheaton College and the Wade Collection well, he made only one afternoon visit to our archives in the midst of a slightly longer trip to Chicago.

What is so sad about Wilson's slipshod scholarship is that he missed an opportunity to look at incredibly rich sources that no one else has used. His talent and insight could have shaped those materials into a truly original contribution. But alas, we have a new book on Lewis that tells us nothing original. On the contrary, it is replete with factual errors tied to a rather simplistic Freudian framework. Wilson argues that Lewis spent his life in search of a mother. (His mother died when he was a boy.) During this quest, according to Wilson, Lewis had two premarital affairs with women who were mother substitutes to him. Wilson presents no conclusive evidence for this thesis. Indeed, much of his evidence is wrong. For example, Wilson maintains that Joy Davidman and C.S. Lewis slept together in 1955 before they were married. Wilson's source is Douglas Gresham's oral history interview with me. But this assertion is not in the interview, because Lewis's stepson never made such a statement. In this same vein Wilson has nothing but assumptions to support his thesis that Lewis had an affair with Mrs. Janie Moore.

The reliability of Wilson's book is questionable for still other reasons. The biography is replete with other errors — the sort that happen when a book is hastily conceived, researched, and written. For example, Westchester County should read Duchess County (p. 236), and the Wade Center at Wheaton College has no memorabilia of T.S. Eliot (p. xiii). Malcolm Muggeridge's typewriter is not and never has been at Wheaton College (p. xiii), and the political preferences of Billy Graham and C.S. Lewis are actually rather similar and in a word, conservative, despite Wilson's argument to the contrary (p. xiii).

Errors of this kind are annoying, but they are to be expected when a researcher implies that he has combed a collection he has scarcely glimpsed. Nevertheless, the most tiresome aspect of this book is the patronizing tone. Everyone the author writes about is denigrated — Walter Hooper, Warren Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, J.B. Phillips, Joy Davidman Lewis, and even C.S. Lewis himself.

Frankly, A.N. Wilson's omniscience and preciousness wear rather thin. Lewis has a "workable intelligence" (p. 197), *That Hideous Strength* is "self-indulgent" (p. 189), all of the books in the space trilogy "fail" (p. 191), and Lewis displays "sheer inadequacy as a philosopher" (p. 213). The list of such "insights" goes on *ad nauseam*.

In the last analysis, A.N. Wilson's *C.S. Lewis* is more than a disappointing biography; it is a sad portrait of the biographer. It seems that Wilson's recent literary successes have driven him to the point of hubris. He sees himself as superior to everyone he writes about, and he delights in making his discovery known.

If you are in the market for a book on C.S. Lewis buy Sayer's *Jack* or Griffin's *Clive Staples Lewis*. I certainly would not spend $22.50 for A.N. Wilson's impressionistic and distorted portrait of a man he neither understands nor takes seriously enough to do his homework on.

Lyle W. Dorsett is the curator of the Marion E. Wade Collection at Wheaton College.

Gnostic Epiphanies

by Chilton Williamson, Jr.

The Achievement of Cormac McCarthy
by Vereen M. Bell
Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press;
140 pp., $22.50

◆

Cormac McCarthy, 56-years-old, is the author of five published novels, which between them have sold approximately fifteen thousand copies in the original hardcover editions, published by Random House. (The Ecco Press, in New York City, is maintaining these titles in print in paperback.) Born in Rhode Island, reared in Tennessee, and traveled in Europe, McCarthy has lived, for the past fifteen years or so, in El Paso, Texas, on the verge of the high desert country of the southwestern U.S. and northern Mexico that provided the setting for his latest published work, *Blood Meridian* (1985). There McCarthy is able to live in near anonymity. His closest friends, reportedly, are lawyers and judges. By contrast with the work of his contemporary, the unreadable Thomas Pynchon, McCarthy's novels, according to Professor Bell, are "scarcely read, even in Tennessee, his more or less native state." McCarthy, who refuses stubbornly to abet his publishers and his admirers in their attempts to promote his books, has never had even the limited renown enjoyed by William Faulkner in the 1930's and early 40's. Nevertheless, he is everything that Vereen Bell claims for him: "a major writer in all of the conventional senses of the word, our best unknown major writer by many measures." As for Professor Bell, his own little book is a model of literary

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criticism, clear and elegant in style, unpretentious in aim and expression.

For his typically "grotesque" characters and the Southern setting they frequently inhabit, McCarthy has been compared inevitably to Flannery O'Connor and to Faulkner; in fact he is, as a literary artist, quite unlike either of these writers, no matter how much he may have learned from them. While a major theme of his work—the capacity of human beings for nearly superhuman endurance—is plainly Faulknerian, its treatment as clearly lacks the warmth and variety that Faulkner bestowed on it. Nor does McCarthy, despite the historical setting of much of his fiction, share Faulkner's abiding preoccupation with the social and political texture of the actual past, although a concern for the meaning of history in the abstract is rarely absent from his pages. Bell describes *Outer Dark* (1968)—the story of an incestuous couple separately engaged in their respectively pointless and hopeless journeying—as being as "brutally nihilistic as any serious novel written in this century in this unnihilistic country," and McCarthy's work as a whole as encompassed by "a prevailing gothic and nihilistic mood."

Still (Bell concludes), "as unforbidding and uncompromising as *Outer Dark* is, as untouched by wishful thinking, it is a beautiful book as well—chaste, shapely, and compassionate—and this unlikely combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors finally makes a statement in itself, any paraphrase of which will seem inadequate." The same can be said, I think, for all of McCarthy's novels (with the possible exception of *Blood Meridian*). McCarthy's metaphysic may be grim, but it is never ideologically fixed or dogmatic: "The pressure of meaning in [McCarthy's novels] is strong, but they belligerently resist abstraction and clarification. . . . Not meaning itself but the traditional idea of meaning is made obsolete. . . . In McCarthy's novels . . . the world itself is mysterious enough without involving ideas or transcendence of it. . . . Meaningfulness emanates even where there is no meaning." If McCarthy, both as man and as artist, does not fathom in the universe what Flannery O'Connor found there, it is not because he refuses to do so but because he is unable honestly to find it.

It is, perhaps, more than anything his literary *style* that has separated, in these illiterate times, Cormac McCarthy from the wider readership he deserves. But it is also his style, I think, that marks him finally as a writer with elements of greatness. The problem confronting all modern writers especially, and one which every one of the great moderns has solved in his own way, is how to deal with mundane people, places, situations, and events in a manner that conveys poetic grandeur. The feat requires elevation of the poetic voice, achieved in so unobtrusive a way as to suggest no instantly apparent discrepancy between the treatment itself and the material; of all things in literature, it is perhaps the most difficult of illusions to create. Yet, with it, the artist attains to his distinctive style. Better than almost any contemporary writer I can think of, McCarthy has grappled with this problem. "What with any other novelist would be a merely ornate style," Bell observes, "repeatedly seems to move us toward an epiphany, though only the kind that a seasoned gnostic might construe." Compared to (say) Faulkner in his more experimental novels, McCarthy is not a "difficult" writer; he does not typically write sentences that are particularly lengthy or syntactically complex; he does not favor the subconscious or unconscious voices of Modernism; he prefers the unequivocal device of the omniscient narrator (with all that implies for point-of-view) to advance his stories. On the other hand, he is addicted to the use of technical terms and recondite or archaic words; and his long descriptive passages, rendered with photographic exactitude, become not infrequently tedious. Bell is at pains to demonstrate how the hand of the conscious artist is everywhere apparent in the fabrication of these, yet for most readers the proof is likely to remain in the pudding, not in the recipe.

It would be pleasant to predict that Vereen Bell's elegant monograph will do for Cormac McCarthy's reputation something approaching what Malcolm Cowley's *Portable Faulkner*, published in 1946, did for the work of another Southern novelist of major importance. I, however, venture to make no such prediction.

Chilton Williamson, Jr.'s new novel is The Homestead, *published this spring by Grove Weidenfeld.*

BRIEF MENTIONS

LET THEM CALL ME REBEL: SAUL ALINSKY—HIS LIFE AND LEGACY by Sanford D. Horwitt
New York: Alfred A. Knopf; 595 pp., $29.95

Almost twenty years after his death in 1972, Saul Alinsky continues to be a controversial figure. Trained in sociology at the University of Chicago, Alinsky applied his learning to the task of social organization, first in the "back of the yards" neighborhood of Chicago, then as one of John L. Lewis's henchmen, and ultimately as the great community organizer *par excellence*.

While Horwitt does the best job he can of lionizing his idol, Alinsky emerges as a thoroughly unpleasant character who bragged of his connections with the Capone mob, took a high hand with waiters, craved celebrity status, and dumped his second wife while she was terminally ill. What is worse, very little of Alinsky's efforts were of enduring significance, and the one exception—his neighborhood organization in Chicago—was dependent upon local people who did the real work.

Although Horwitt does not say so, Alinsky was not really interested in organizing neighborhoods per se. Adopting the radical union as his model, Alinsky used neighborhoods as so many battalions in a war against the middle-class power structure. Power for the organization and tax-subsidized privileges for his constituents were his main objectives, not community empowerment. Alinsky is often praised as a pragmatist in contrast with the revolutionary leftists of the 1960's; in fact, his hard-boiled pursuit of wealth and power cannot stand comparison with the New Left's almost Jeffersonian vision of community self-government.

—*Thomas Fleming*

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The Shiny Surface of Obscurity

by Cosma Siani

Mottetti, Poems of Love: The Motets of Eugenio Montale
Translated and Introduced by Dana Gioia
Saint Paul, MN: Graywolf Press; 77 pp., $14.95

◆

"Nobody would write verse if poetry were a question of 'making oneself understood'; indeed, it is a question of making understood that *quiddity* which words alone fail to convey." This much-quoted statement by Eugenio Montale, the Nobel Prize-winning Italian poet who died in 1981, may serve as an introduction to these *Motets*, a sequence of 20 short poems, as well as to the most acclaimed style of his poetry as represented in his collections *Cuttlefish Bones* (1925), *The Occasions*, which includes the motets (1939), and *The Storm and Other Things* (1956).

But how does that principle work in Montale's own creative writing? And what is it that words may "fail to convey"? The tiny book under review, equipped as it is with a short essay of Montale's himself ("Two Jackals on a Leash," in Jonathan Galassi's version) and with an introduction by the translator, Dana Gioia, provides us with everything we need to find a way out of an otherwise vague and even cryptic assertion.

An example will best demonstrate the poet's assumption. Here is the autobiographical report of a stroll around a town in Northern Italy (in the passage, the poet calls himself Mirco, while Clizia is a fictitious name for the American Dante scholar Irma Brandeis, whom Montale met in Florence in 1932):

> One summer afternoon Mirco found himself at Modena walking in the galleries. Anxious as he was, and still absorbed in his "dominating idea," it astonished him that life could present him with so many distractions, as if painted or reflected on a screen. It was too gay a day for a man who wasn't gay. And then an old man in gold-braided livery appeared to Mirco, dragging two reluctant champaigne-colored puppies on a leash, two little dogs who at first glance seemed to be neither wolfhounds nor dachshunds nor Pomeranians. Mirco approached the old man and asked him, "What kind of dogs are these?" And the old man, dry and proud, answered, "They're not dogs, they're jackals." . . . Clizia loved droll animals. How amused she would have been to see them! thought Mirco. And from that day on he never read the name Modena without associating the city with his idea of Clizia and the two jackals. A strange, persistent idea. Could the two beasts have been sent by her like an emanation? Were they an emblem, an occult signature, a *senhal*? Or were they only an hallucination, the premonitory signs of her fall, her end?
>
> Similar things often happened; there were no more jackals, but other strange products from the grab-bag of life: poodles, monkeys, owls on a trestle, minstrels. . . . And always, a healing balm entered the heart of the wound.

The setting is ordinary and so are the events—a microcosm of commonplace things and everyday gestures. The only unexpected detail is the two jackals on a leash; but it, too, would have been lost in the flow of perceptions, had the poet not stopped and talked to the old man.

Here the poet is trying to frame in plain words an utterly subjective train of thought: the link, in other respects undetectable, between the person who is his "dominating idea" and some micro-events falling within the scope of his experience. And he is successful in explaining because he meets our logical expectations. But has he managed to involve us at an emotional level, and to make us feel the incident the way he felt it? This is perhaps what the explanatory words fail to achieve, and what the poem inspired by the Modena episode is supposed to produce:

> I had almost lost
> hope of ever seeing you again;
>
> and I asked myself if this thing
> cutting me off
> from every trace of you, this
> screen
> of images,
> was the approach of death, or
> truly
> some dazzling
> vision of you
> out of the past,
> bleached, distorted,
> fading:
>
> (under the arches at Modena
> I saw an old man in a uniform
> dragging two jackals on a leash).

The readers' puzzlement over the literal meaning of the poem is an indication of their involvement. The lack of a frame of reference becomes an element of attraction, and even an unintentional strategy. We are faced with the challenge of reconstructing the poet's state of mind. It is a method that puts a great demand on its reading public.

The motet above and the *Motets* in general are probably not the finest examples of Montale's excellence in this method, of his mastery over the selection and blending of words and images to conjure up an atmosphere or to suggest vanishing nuances. (My favorite specimen is "The Storm," the eponym piece from the 1956 collection.) However, the task of translating the sequence, now for the first time available in English in its entirety, has surely not been an easy one for Dana Gioia. How has he coped with it? Being a poet in his own right, he has claimed space for himself, and decided to offer versions that "would move naturally as English-language poems." Accordingly, he has tried "to set an English cadence that would integrate the transposed elements tightly into a new whole," the outcome being "an imitation" as opposed to mere paraphrase.

As comparison in this bilingual edition shows, the most remarkable liberty he has taken is in rethinking the lineation of the originals; we often have numerous half-lines where Montale has used a longer measure patterned into more compact stanzas. Yet there are instances where Dana Gioia can get close to Montale's rhythm and

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peculiar mood, as in Motet X:

> Why are you waiting? The
> squirrel in the pine tree
> beats its torchlike tail on the
> bark.
> The half moon sinks with one
> tip fading
> into the sun. The day is
> finished.
>
> The lazy smoke is startled by a
> breeze
> but gathers itself to cover you.
> Nothing will end, or everything,
> if you,
> the flash of lightning, leave the
> cloud.

(A misprint must have escaped proofreading in the fourth line: following the original meaning, "The day" should be "The night.") And here in Motet XVII is an example of how cleverly he can combine adherence to the original text and claim to personal re-creation:

> The frog, first to try its chord
> again
> from the reed-choked, misty
> pond,
> the rustle of the interwoven
> carob trees where a cold sun
> is snuffing out its own
> weak rays, the slow
> drone of hornets in the flowers
> where there's still a little sap—
> the last sounds,
> the bare life of the country.
> One breath
> and the hour is extinguished: a
> sky
> the color of slate prepares for
> the explosion
> of death-thin horses, of flaming
> hooves.

Montale shared his unorthodox structure, illogical sequence, and subjective language with a generation of interwar Italian poets that included Ungaretti and Quasimodo. Montale was keenly aware of the European influences—mainly from French Symbolism—that the Hermetic school of poetry received and spread this side of the Alps. But Montale did more than just lean to modernist taste. As Gioia points out, a whole world of classics—the heritage common to all students who had undergone classical education, or "liceo classico," in Italy—was at work in his background.

> . . . Montale's pessimism does not arise from either existential *nausée* or decadent ennui, but from an acceptance of life without any comforting illusions. His vision focuses on the tragic insight ultimately behind all philosophy—the recognition that man's life is meager compared to the inexhaustible and eternal presence of the world. In this sense perhaps Montale seems closer to Sophocles than to Eliot. . . . If one wanted to find a comparable sensibility in European poetry, one would turn not to any contemporary but to the other great poet of the Italian landscape, Lucretius the Epicurean. . . .

As long as it does not make one overlook the decisive influence of European modernist trends in the shaping of Montale's sensibility and verse, the argument is helpful in pointing out the poet's complexity.

But the book under review also reminds us of another aspect of Montale's writing that is at the moment overshadowed by his reputation as a poet: his neatness and clarity as an essayist—qualities that, unfortunately, are not easily found in Italian letters after Croce. The short essay most appropriately appended to this edition of *Mottetti* is a significant sample of the other side of Montale's talents.

Cosma Siani is a teacher and textbook writer living in Rome.

Dance to the Music of Time

by E. Christian Kopff

Ovid's Poetry of Exile
Translated into verse by David R. Slavitt
Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press; 240 pp., $32.50 (hardcover), $12.95 (paper)

◆

The struggle to keep poetry alive is a game of tag-team wrestling, and the greatest poets play their matches with the poets of ancient Greece and Rome. We all know it for Latin. Plautus and Vergil are centones of Greek verse, their originality hidden, for some, by passage after passage taken directly from Greek poetry.

English poets have played in the same arena. Shakespeare learned how to make verse sing and stage action jump by rewriting Ovid and Plautus. The classic tradition of English verse begins with John Sylvester's translation of Du Bartas and hits its stride with Dryden's Vergil and Pope's Homer. (Professors should not be allowed to pontificate on "The Rape of the Lock" and "The Epistle to Doctor Arbuthnot" until they have worked through Pope's *Iliad*.) From Milton to T.S. Eliot our greatest poets have known Greek and Latin and other languages to boot and have filled their verse with echoes and quotations. English poetry grew strong out of that sometimes rough-and-ready contact sport.

So it is no wonder that our contemporary poetry is anemic and asthmatic, that it wheezes out limp phrases, mumbling to itself about personal problems or the politics of newspaper editorials. It needs to be sent south to the Mediterranean for its health. Its regimen must be the classics in the original tongues. It has to resign its current motto: "Better mendacities than the classics in paraphrase."

If American poetry does manage to rise above easy despair and gimpy-legged verse, it may look back to David Slavitt as one of its chief benefactors. In 1971 he gave us *The Eclogues of Virgil*, a lively and exciting mosaic of translation placed carefully in the midst of poetic, moral, and political reflections, which is still my favorite book by him.

Now he has tried something bigger, *maius opus*, an attempt to re-feel and rewrite the extant poetry that Ovid wrote while passing the last decade of his life in Tomis, modern Constansa in Rumania. He had written a poem and he had made a mistake (*carmen et error*) and the Emperor Augustus sent Ovid out of Rome, never to return.

Ovid did not stop writing poetry. His career had been founded on his brilliant success in taking the conventions of Latin personal love poetry, born from Catullus' genius and his affair with the wife of a Roman consul, and playing with these conventions so

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that they became immensely funny and perfectly unusable for later poets. Now at the end of his life Ovid came full circle and showed that great poetry could indeed be built on the rag-and-bone shop of personal experience and emotion.

Slavitt's renderings are related to Ovid's exile poetry as Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* relates to the *Metamorphoses*. They are an attempt to solve Ovid's problem as he would have solved it were he writing contemporary English. To put the question as Slavitt put it to Vergil's *Eclogues*: "If you were ever a living, breathing poem, what could you conceivably have been about?" One by one the poems that Ovid penned so long ago on the shores of the Black Sea give an answer to that no doubt impudent question.

It is an American answer. Ovid calls his volume *liber*. Slavitt calls it "booko" and "little bookaroo." In one poem, a kind of elegiac *Alcestis*, Ovid imagines what his wife felt like as she resigns herself to staying behind in Rome to try to win her husband's reprieve. Slavitt turns the spotlight from Alcestis to Admetus and lets us hear Ovid's feelings as he walked away from his home and his family.

> A man can lose his life in
> different ways:
> it bleeds out or flies away in that
> last gasp.
> But to walk away from a
> life . . . I've no idea
> whether it's harder or not, but I
> cannot suppose the dead
> desire still to die, that the
> suffering stop.
> I never had anything like it
> happen—so that survival
> was something to be ashamed
> of. Only a brute
> could have kept on walking and
> living past that corner.
> Whatever worth there was in
> me died there.

To catch the mood, Slavitt feels no need to stick to the words. So *Vergilium vidi tantum* becomes

> I saw Vergil once at a
> party
> but didn't have the nerve to
> go up to speak
> to the great man.

The grand rhetoric in praise of poetry that ends the Fourth Book of *Tristia* becomes in Slavitt's hands a piece of personal reminiscence, but the gracious nod to the reader remains.

> Some days, I lay down
> my pen, stretch,
> and go outside to tramp
> along the beach,
> lean into the cold salt wind, and
> feel the earth
> solid under my feet, and I
> laugh, thinking
> how it may not get me all. The
> best could survive for years:
> this profitless pursuit my
> father, who gave me
> life, disapproved of greets you
> now, reader, with thanks
> for your attention by which I
> remain alive.

It is hard to believe that many classicists will use this version in their courses on Latin literature in translation. Ovid's tone is here, his love of language, and the lively interaction of rhetoric and emotion. The imagery and the content are often different, and they form the basis of our lectures. This translation is for other poets. It shows them that a poet's life can be a vital part of a creative persona and that the poetry of other times and other languages can still inform great English verse, as it has for so many centuries. It gives us all a part of Ovid we had lost. As Slavitt wrote about Vergil's first *Eclogue*: "Dead, the Latin dead, his groan is still alive."

E. Christian Kopff teaches Ovid at the University of Colorado in Boulder.

Hell Is Other People

by Florence King

The Loony Bin Trip
by Kate Millett
New York: Simon and Schuster;
352 pp., $19.95

◆

Remember Kate Millett? She made the cover of *Time* in 1970 after her dissection of literary machismo, *Sexual Politics*, became a blockbuster best-seller and won her the title of leading feminist spokesperson.

It didn't last. Although she was married, she soon announced that she was a lesbian, which split the women's movement and destroyed her superstar status. Thereafter came two rambling autobiographical books, and a series of liberal causes that finally got her expelled from Iran for trying to stir up the Ayatollah's docile female population.

During this time she also suffered from manic depression and was committed twice by family members. She emerged from the hospital dependent on the drug Lithium to balance her moods, only to make the ironic discovery that balanced moods are inimical to creativity. Lithium slows the thought process and represses brain activity, which interfered with her writing, while its side effect of hand tremors interfered with her sculpting and painting.

In the early 80's, Millett decided to go off Lithium and take her chances. This harrowing, often unbearable book is the story of what happened to her when she tried to buck a system and an era that have declared war on self-reliance.

Trying to go cold turkey while running an artists' colony and feminist commune on her upstate New York farm, she was thwarted at every turn by the bevy of do-your-own thing blithe spirits with whom she had surrounded herself. With the studied casualness of the sane confronting the mad, they kept asking her "Are you all right?" and "How do you feel?" until she was ready to scream.

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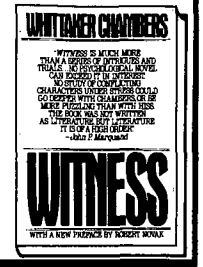

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With cheeky, college-age lesbian hippies running in and out of her office, yelling and playing rock music, she did scream: "I lost my temper while trying to write a check." Her perfectly natural outburst "proved" to the communards that she had entered a manic stage and was losing her mind. They ganged up on her and nagged her to take her Lithium, and even though she was the owner of the farm, she was rendered helpless by the sacred structure of commune life: "Impudent kid, I think again, aware that our democratic style does not really grant me any literal authority over anyone; it is all to be a product of personality, and mine is in ruins."

Soon these committed pacifists, including her own lesbian lover, a proponent of every conceivable civil right, decided to use force: "Her hand approaches my mouth so fast I hardly see it; she is forcing the pill between my lips, her other hand reaching to hold my chin, as one forces a child to take pills, even a dog. Sheila's a paid-up member of the American Civil Liberties Union."

To her terrified disbelief, her sister, her lover, and several friends tried to get around New York's involuntary commitment law ("It's done all the time") to have her institutionalized so she would be forced to take Lithium. Their excuse was that she was spending money like water—what was once the sin of waste is now a "symptom" of mania to those of little faith in anything but the religion of psychiatry.

In commitment interviews her every natural reaction conspired against her; Irish as Paddy's pig and endowed with an artistic temperament, she nonetheless had to prove her sanity by following the law of the loony bin: "Keep your temper and never raise your voice." American cultural ignorance was another nemesis: a chance literary reference, natural enough for a writer, to a scene in a Dumas novel made the doctors think she was hallucinating, and she had to refrain from laughing too hysterically when a self-satisfied feminist psychiatrist complimented her with "You didn't decompose." She meant that Millett remained admirably calm during an examination.

Matters came to a head when Millett went to Ireland and got involved with Bernadette Devlin, the Irish Labour Party, and the hunger strikers in Ulster. If Franz Kafka had written the screenplay of *The Snake Pit*, it would still fall short of Millett's description of what happened to her in the Auld Sod when the commitment cabal back home joined forces with the Irish constabulary to have her snatched from the airport and dumped in an insane asylum in the wilds of County Clare. Here, in a scabrous ward of moaning old women whose families no longer wanted them, she is sedated not only with Lithium but several other tranquilizers, becoming a prisoner of "the triumph of ignorance: television and narcotic fantasy," until her Irish political allies gain her release.

This is a gripping and valuable book, the kind we have been getting lately from former feminist honchos who seem to be sidling up to conservatism. Anti-porn activist Andrea Dworkin now hates the ACLU, Susan Brownmiller has turned into a starchy spinster who unabashedly "blamed the victim" in her Hedda Nussbaum novel, and now Kate Millett has declared war on the insidious mental health industry and the passivity of a citizenry that accepts prescription pills

> not only for manic depression but for the blues, ordinary depression, and alcoholism, even for schoolchildren who are hyperactive . . . whatever synthetic they are all eating so obediently has become a form of social control . . . because this psychiatrist thing is in itself a form of social control.

Unfortunately, she fingers the wrong villain. She blames "fascism," "Reagan's new America," the Pope and the CIA for pioneering the authoritarianism that psychiatry has adopted, unable or unwilling to see that it is her own liberal side of the political spectrum that enshrined psychiatry in the first place, beginning with the fashionable craze for Freud in the 20's down to today's constant admonitions to "seek professional help" for the slightest upset. The perfectibility of mankind, whether through yammering on the couch or through biochemistry, is a liberal goal. The conservative takes his leaf from Seneca: "Scorn pain; either it will go away or you will." Conservatives don't believe in coddling people, but neither do we kill them with the kindness that Millett endured.

This is a personal story; she says nothing about the need for involuntary commitment among the raving homeless, many of whom were sprung from mental institutions by an erring liberalism that likes to extend freedom for groups while restricting it for individuals. Except for spready analyses of farming problems and muzzy descriptions of lesbian ecstasies ("the billy goat of our perfect shamelessness" unconsciously combines the two), Millett's writing here is highly readable and effective, marked by a self-described style of "run-of-the-mouth Americanese" that is often ingratiating.

The book's most pleasant surprise is her casual and unselfconscious repudiation of radical feminism as she watches a horse:

> Suddenly the maleness, the majesty of its maleness, opens itself to me and I love it, revere it. Remember in a burst how I have always loved it, maleness, men themselves, all things masculine. . . . I had forgotten, too, its place in things, its half of the universe. As if in the years of feminism and the need to square imbalance it had seemed necessary to negate what claimed too much for itself.

That should soothe the reviewer who said that reading *Sexual Politics* was like "sitting with your testicles in a nutcracker."

Florence King's new book, Lump It or Leave It, *is out this month from St. Martin's Press.*

Our Tribal Pasts

by Tim Hunter

Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America
by David Hackett Fischer
New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press; 944 pp., $39.95

◆

This readable and remarkable book is the first in David Hackett Fischer's projected series regarding

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American cultural history. In it, Fischer has drawn upon many sources of important information: narratives, statistics, linguistics, literature, diaries, topography, architecture, and political science. The result is a brilliant and formidable achievement, a major American contribution to the international tradition of great historical writing.

Fischer is a revisionist who subscribes to the "Teutonic germ" theory of American history, believing that the roots of the American system are to be found in pre-Latin Germany where a cultural tradition originated that was later carried to England and, still later, to the English colonies of North America. Here, he argues, colonization principally consisted of four "germ" populations, which arrived with no particular interest in associating with their neighbors in other colonies and came in fact from regions of the British Isles so different as to almost constitute separate countries. Fischer presents extensive proof that British North America was settled by geographical areas that each group intended for its use. Only in the case of the Quakers was this exclusivity discarded on the basis of principle.

When the migration to the Tidewater South began, the earliest colonists were wealthy men who brought servants. These settlers came generally from the southern and western English counties, an area of Britain that had an ancient ethnic and political identity associated with the early Saxon population. Massachusetts was settled between 1629 and 1640 by approximately 21,000 persons emigrating as part of a larger Puritan movement to escape the England of Charles I: altogether, about 80,000 Puritans left their home country in this period, primarily for religious and political reasons, to resettle in Europe, the Caribbean, and America. The East Anglians, sometimes as entire congregations following a particular clergyman, traveled to New England; not surprisingly, their society was more regimented than those of the other English groups.

It is interesting that a number of the Puritans returned to England following the victory of the Parliamentary forces in the English Civil War. Few Puritans migrated to the Tidewater areas, and many of those who did wound up being evicted for their "offensive" views. Fischer shows that the Puritans were mostly people with roots in the countryside of East Anglia, the majority of the Puritan families coming from an area within sixty miles of the town of Haverhill, near the counties of Suffolk, Essex, and Cambridge. East Anglia too was a region peculiar in Britain, being heavily populated and characterized by a continuing mixture of foreign influences such as Dutch, north German, and Scandinavian. East Anglia, furthermore, had a very strong Danish element—the result of long Danish occupation—and later Norman settlement was very prevalent.

Altogether about 23,000 Quakers emigrated to the Delaware Valley from the North Midlands, a region which had been so heavily Scandinavian in its settlement that as late as the Middle Ages Norse was still in daily use. This is the desolate, wild region made famous by Emily Brontë in *Wuthering Heights* and by Charlotte Brontë in *Jane Eyre*. The Quaker population established a unique culture, notable for its architecture, family life, cooking, and the idea of "reciprocal liberty" (a kind of libertarianism) in parts of New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware, where it persists in spite of the decline of Quakers in proportion to the rest of the community. The largest group—numbering over 250,000—of British immigrants was the Backcountry Borderers, who came from the Scottish British border area and the Protestant communities in Ireland. These colonists, who migrated between 1717-1775, were the last British group to arrive in North America before the Revolution. They settled in the American backcountry, in the Appalachians, where they subsequently became known for their fierce independence, militant religion, and rustic ways.

These four "germ" groups, though all from the British Isles, spoke in dialects almost unintelligible to one another and differed sharply in their understanding of the Protestant religion. Although they drew closer in North America than they had been in Great Britain, their descendants developed an *ad hoc* patchwork society and political system that reflected their continued differences and uncertainties in regard to each other. The contradictory and uneven imprint of each group remains today as a source of confusion to everyone, including Americans who can't figure out why different meanings are attached to the same words by their neighbors. To Fischer, the paradoxical American system is a mystery only up to a point where one begins to note the profound differences consequent to a multiple British heritage. Fischer's "four British folkways" have generally provided the basis for the process of Americanization that millions of non-British immigrants have passed through. Non-British Americans inevitably absorbed the Americanisms closest to hand through the cultures of those descendants whose ancestors first colonized Massachusetts, the Delaware Valley, the Appalachian Highlands, or the southern Tidewater regions and the lower Chesapeake.

David Hackett Fischer's book raises important questions concerning the character of major American social and political issues. Have American disputes actually arisen out of tribal issues of centuries ago as well as from the transcendent intellectual and moral subjects as constitute the modern syllabus? Have national arguments regarding economics, law, sociology, and other matters really been veils for deeper and more inchoate preoccupations? *Albion's Seed* could reopen some profound political and cultural questions. For instance, why should one area—Massachusetts—disproportionately dominate so many aspects of American culture and society? Should Massachusetts determine the system of government, the political issues, the cultural identity, the religious fashions and educational forms, and confirm the national aesthetic for 220 million other people? (The 21,000 Puritan immigrants are believed by Fischer to have 16 million descendants.)

These questions remain to be answered, perhaps by Mr. Fischer in his next book in this series. Having shown us that four British horses started at the gate, he could explain how one horse now consistently outpaces the other three.

Tim Hunter, a consultant with private business and government, served in the Reagan and Bush administrations, most recently with the Interior Department and the Presidential Transition Office.

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Letter From the Heartland

by Jane Greer

We're Not as Dumb as They Think

It's gone just about too far this time.

In the past year, North and South Dakota were included in a group of states described as "America's Outback" by *Newsweek*. As if that weren't bad enough, both states were also left out of a Rand McNally photographic atlas. (The editors smiled urbanely, one imagines, and claimed the discrepancy was "inadvertent," but we of the Outback, the Buffalo Commons, America's waste-disposal lot, know better, from long experience.)

We lived through the ignominy. Sons and daughters of pioneers, we're survivors. We hitched up old Bossy to the plow and went about our daily lives as if nothing had hurt.

But *now*: the R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company has announced that it's coming out with a cigarette called, of all things, "Dakota," meant to appeal to young, poorly educated, lower-middle-class women all across the country. Kind of makes you want to *move* here, doesn't it?

Let us not forget that RJR has had to snuff one new product already this year: "Uptown," a cigarette targeting black Americans. Well, that particular group of Americans happens to form a large minority that gets *listened* to when it complains. Complain it did, and rightfully so, claiming that the marketing gimmick was not only patronizing but deadly: young black men are among the heaviest smokers in the country. Two weeks after the news about "Uptown" hit the media, the outcry from black America was so loud that plans to introduce the cigarette went up in smoke.

But Dakotans—North and South—are a much smaller, more manipulable minority with much less clout. We're resigned to being ignored, and used to taking a lot of ribbing, even from our neighboring states (several of whom have *very* little reason to feel superior), and not complaining much at all. "Dakota" cigarettes, though, may just do the trick.

The RJR marketing plan, made public by the *Washington Post*, offers this alluring profile of the average "Dakota" smoker: a woman with only a high school education, holding a "job" but not working at a "career." Her interests? "Partying with friends, dancing, going to clubs and bars, cruising, watching television, and shopping at the mall." Her live entertainment of choice? "Drag races, motocross, motorcycle races, hot rod shows, cycle shows, tractor pulls, monster trucks, wrestling, and tough-man competitions." Her favorite television show is *Roseanne*. The "Dakota" woman wants to get married, but until she walks down the aisle she will spend her free time "with her boyfriend, doing whatever *he's* doing."

"How dumb do they think we are?" asked Kathleen Wiebers, executive director of the South Dakota Lung Association. South Dakota has the fifth-lowest smoking rate in the nation, at 21.1 percent of the adult population. North Dakota is right in there, too; fewer than one-fourth of all North Dakotans smoke.

"Our women are more intelligent than that. I don't know where they get the idea that because we're out here in the wide-open spaces, we're stupid," said Alice Kundert, a former South Dakota secretary of state who has served as Christmas Seals chairwoman for the Lung Association.

Representative Cathy Rydell, a Bismarck, North Dakota, legislator who sponsored a 1987 state law to limit smoking in public places, found the cigarette and its name distasteful, but North Dakota tourism director Jim Fuglie doesn't mind the use of "Dakota" so long as the word "North" is absent. "Dakota," he said, "is a word that conjures up a tough guy or Old West images." (I don't know about the rest of you girls, but that's the look *I* try to achieve.)

I predict that RJR will stub out *this* cigarette, too, before it's ever marketed (or shortly thereafter), even though, due to the very nature of North and South Dakotans, the company won't get the mail or public tongue-clucking on "Dakota" that it did on "Uptown."

For one thing, "Dakota" is simply the wrong name, demographically speaking, to use in seducing a large number of women. There are millions more women in the South, for instance, than in the Wild West, and it's the *Southern* women who have a *reputation*, deserved or not (surely it's not), for frequenting drag races and "professional" wrestling matches on the arm of a swaggering, toothpick-chewing stud. It would have been just as effective to name the cigarette "Grits" or "Possum Hollow" or, best of all, "Graceland," if RJR wanted sheer *numbers*. But then, those names would have been too *obviously* patronizing, wouldn't they?

In the second place, someone with a high school education who lives in the malls probably doesn't know where the Dakotas *are*—or that they have a virile Western reputation. A cigarette named "Death Valley" or "Tombstone" would stand more of a chance of tantalizing the women in the profile; they might have heard those names on reruns.

Mostly, though, women across the country are *not* as stupid as the boys at RJR seem to think. Those of us who don't already smoke probably won't start. Those of us who *do* smoke most likely have a favorite brand—and have proven fiercely resistant to change. And for years the cigarette *fantasy* of choice for most American women has been the Marlboro man, oozing more blue-eyed, barrel-chested, leather-faced virility than we can stand. Why would any of us want to pretend to *be* the Marlboro man?

Jane Greer lives in Bismarck, North Dakota. She smoked an entire pack of something or other one night in Brookings, South Dakota, when she was 19 and hasn't touched cigarettes since then.

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Letter From the Lower Right

by John Shelton Reed

Another Country

◆

Most of my news this month has to do, one way or another, with country music. In a roundabout way, a story out of South Carolina last fall got me thinking about that particular contribution of the South to world civilization.

It seems the dean of student affairs at the University of South Carolina asked the band to stop playing "Louie, Louie" at Gamecock football games. The spontaneous dancing the song provoked threatened the structural integrity of the university's football stadium.

Now, "Louie, Louie" is a grand period piece, a classic of the "Animal House" era. It's got a great beat, you can dance to it, and obviously people do. But "Louie, Louie" is about as far removed from country music as an American popular song can be. A remarkable aspect of that song, almost its essence, is that you can't understand the words. Moreover, *it doesn't matter*.

With country music, if you can't understand the words there's no point to it. The best of it is just good Southern talk, set to what are usually some pretty banal tunes. Just listen to George Jones, or to Hank Williams Jr., or to Loretta Lynn. Two examples, off the top of my head, of the power of words in country music: if the story in Dolly Parton's "Coat of Many Colors" doesn't make you cry, you have a heart of stone. And next time some judge is too scrupulous about defendants' rights, you'll find that Charlie Daniels' "Simple Man" articulates your feelings so well that you may want to reconsider them; it is, in fact, a stirring invitation to lynch law.

The point is that country music is almost always *about* something—not just about feeling romantic or lustful, either—and it recounts its stories with attention to the telling detail and the just-right phrase. Remarkably, this is more true now than even a decade ago. After some years of wandering in the lush wilderness of "the Nashville sound," a number of young singers have shown that you *can* turn back the clock. Among these neotraditionalists, my favorite (and apparently everybody else's) is North Carolina's Randy Travis, who rivals the great George Jones when it comes to tearjerkers. Kentucky-bred Californian Dwight Yoakum is also worth a listen, although he has become a little too mannered for my taste.

Even more interesting in some ways are a few young musicians who have *not* simply reverted to the classic style. Lyle Lovett, for instance, can do traditional country as well as anyone, and does it to startling effect on his version of Tammy Wynette's hit "Stand By Your Man." As that example indicates, he doesn't hesitate to do the unexpected: one side of the album "Lyle Lovett's Large Band," for example, isn't country at all, but big-band swing. But my point here is that Lovett turns a phrase and tells a story with the best of the traditionalists.

So does another Texas singer-songwriter, Steve Earle. He, too, is no traditionalist; for one thing, he writes the kind of tunes you go around humming. His politics are probably unsound (though not his contempt for politicians). But his lyrics present a far more vivid and sympathetic picture of the frustrations of small-town and blue-collar American life than anything you'll hear from Bruce Springsteen. He sings about his "Sweet Little '66," oil-burning and gas-guzzling, but "made by union labor on American soil." (This is not your generic Beach Boys car song.) He sings about the life of a traveling musician with "a three-pack habit and a motel tan." And one of the all-time best lines in country music comes from a terrific song about a family man's impulsive Mexican fling: "I threw the car-seat in the dumpster and I headed out into the night."

Country music often presents little dramas, and sometimes it's grotesque—like life. Let me record a few recent news items that could easily be the stuff of country music. (OK, a transparently flimsy transition. I know.)

Consider the story of an infant put up for adoption who grows up and inadvertently marries his own mother. Sort of a classic theme, wouldn't you say? As it happens, that's the real-life predicament of a Tennessean named Danny James Bass. Mr. Bass has now filed for divorce, and he's trying to sell rights to his story to the producers of *Dallas*. But I say it's a natural-born country song.

Or how about the saga of Mary Sue and Junior Davis? Last year a circuit court judge in Tennessee ruled that the dozen children of the recently divorced Davises were entitled to the protection of the state, notwithstanding that the offspring in question were embryos resident on petri dishes in a hospital freezer. Apparently Junior wanted to massacre the innocents to avoid having to pay child-support, while Mary Sue wanted to keep the little chaps alive, whether out of maternal feeling or spite was not stipulated. (Incidentally, the same folks who explained to me why only the mother's wishes should be consulted were mightily displeased when those wishes prevailed, in a ruling based not on her rights but on those of the children.) Science and law march on, and I know there's a ballad in there somewhere.

You think we may not be ready for songs about incest and infanticide (or whatever)? Well, maybe, but we already have a bunch about adultery and domestic violence, and at least one each about statutory rape (Hank Williams Jr.: "Knoxville Courthouse Blues"), homophobic violence (Charlie Daniels: "New Uneasy Rider"), and castration (Bobby Bare: "Big Dupree"). If you don't know country music, incidentally, maybe I should point out that the last two of these songs are *funny*.

Country music can also be downright weepy, of course, especially after a few drinks. And it seems that listening to the "wailing, lonesome, self-pitying" variety of country music encourages drinking. After a ten-year study of a bar in Missoula and less intensive study of 65 other taverns in the Minneapolis area, James Schaefer told the American Anthropological Association that slower music means faster drinking, and he has the numbers to prove it. "I don't think this warrants a surgeon general's warning or anything," Schaefer told the AP. "But people should be aware that they are more likely to lose their control and self-restraint in a country and western bar than anywhere else."

It was not reported whether Leonard Ray Lee was listening to country music but he certainly had been drink-

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ing when he lost his self-restraint last August and led police on a chase through Wilson County, North Carolina, that covered 50 miles in half an hour. (That's an *average* of 100 mph, for those of you who are computationally challenged.) The chase ended after a cross-country run through a number of fences and a police car. An image worthy of *The Dukes of Hazzard*: at one point Lee's El Camino got stuck in a ditch, but it was knocked free when a police car struck it from behind.

Lee told trooper Cecil Mercer that he'd always wondered what a high-speed chase was like, had enjoyed himself, and had no regrets. I'll be disappointed if nobody's immortalizing Lee in song right now; the outlaw ballad is a standard genre, after all.

Speaking of desperadoes, the *Roanoke Times* reported the arrest of five of them for catching bass with dynamite in Smith Mountain Lake. The arrests reportedly came after a "two-year undercover investigation." This led columnist Dave Barry to wonder how an undercover agent penetrates a fish dynamiting ring. "Does he just show up at the lake one day, poke through his tackle box for a while, and then announce in a loud voice: 'Darn! I forgot my dynamite!'?" If Jerry Reed can sing a courtroom song about alimony ("You Got the Goldmine, I Got the Shaft"), surely someone can do something with a fish dynamiting trial.

By the way, don't get the idea that the drama in country music is all in the lyrics. Consider Grand Ole Opry star Little Jimmy Dickens, who was having his breakfast one morning last year when his wife read him an article in the Nashville *Tennessean* about Lydia Roberts. Mrs. Roberts had been in jail for 99 days because she had no money to post $2,500 bail on a bad-check charge. Jimmy turned to his wife and delivered this great line in iambic tetrameter: "Go get that woman out of jail." She did.

In yet another Nashville court last year, bluegrass music legend Bill Monroe, 77, stood accused of hitting Ms. Wanda Huff, 51, in the mouth with a Bible and trying to kill her with firewood. (That's all the newspaper said.) Mr. Monroe countercharged that Ms. Huff had harassed him by letter and telephone, made numerous threats, thrown her glasses on the roof of his house, and let his dogs out of the kennel. Charges against Mr. Monroe were dismissed when Ms. Huff was found to have brought a loaded pistol to court.

While we're on the subject of guns, and potential country-music lyrics, the North Carolina *Independent* claims to have overheard this one at the Dixie Gun and Knife Show in Raleigh: "I only aimed a gun at one human being, and then I married her."

Enough odds and ends. The point is just that, to coin a phrase, life imitates art, and country songwriters have a lot of raw material to work with — without even leaving Nashville, for that matter.

Country music still has a special relation to the American South, of course, but it now has fans, no doubt thanks in part to U.S. Armed Forces Radio, around the world. I have never personally heard the music at an establishment in Manila called the Hobbitt House, where all the staff are midgets (my informant caught a show that featured a midget Elvis impersonator), but I have heard Buck Owens as rendered by a Filipino band at the Intercontinental Hotel in Jakarta. More interesting than slavish imitation of American singers singing American songs, though, are what seem to be emerging indigenous country-music traditions. Some unlikely places are assimilating country music and making it their own. Let me close this overlong letter by telling you about the Thai Country Music Hall of Fame.

The *Bangkok Post* for last September 15 just recently made its way to the West, at least to my part of it, and a notice in the "Outlook" section announced that "the biggest event ever in Thai music history" was to take place the next day. Get this: over a hundred singers and composers were gathering for a festival to celebrate "Half a Century of Thai Country Music" and to name 50 of the all-time greatest songs to the newly established Hall of Fame.

Now, I had no idea that there was such a thing as Thai country music, much less that it had been around for fifty years. But the very first Thai country song, *O Chao Sao Chao Rai* ("The Farm Girl" — I'll just give the translated titles from now on), was sung in 1939 by Kamron Samboonnanond (whose gilded guitar was to be displayed at the festival). Obviously, "The Farm Girl" was one of the songs destined for the Hall of Fame.

Choosing the other 49 was harder. Not only did a song have to have staying power, but both its tune and its singer's style had to be original, which ruled out a number of well-known songs, including the ever-popular "Love Faded at Bangpakong." This festival was a government undertaking, sponsored by the minister of education, a fact that would have caused problems in the U.S., but if you're going to have government patronage of the arts there's a lot to be said for monarchy. The Thai Cultural Commission simply required that the language of Hall of Fame songs be "in good taste," and so (I quote from the *Post*) "Lop Burirat's *Diew Kor Mum Sia Rok* (I'll Eat You Now), though very popular, failed in this category." Similarly, a number called "Still Looking Good at Thirty" was excluded as not "in tune with the morale and culture of society." No Thai Civil Liberties Union stepped forward to argue about the commission's right to impose that criterion or the selection committee's interpretation of it — even though it might seem to leave a good deal of latitude. Bangkok may be world-renowned for what is sometimes called its "sex tourism industry," but at least a Thai Mapplethorpe or Serrano will get no recognition or support from his government.

To judge from their titles, Thai country songs deal with pretty much the same themes as American ones. "Still Looking Good at Thirty," for instance, could be put up against Jerry Lee Lewis's "Thirty-nine and Holding." But one of the Hall of Fame titles shows that the East can still be mysterious, and that maybe Kipling was right about when the twain would meet. Among seven songs "chosen to be specially honoured," and presumably thoroughly "in tune with the morale and culture of society," was one whose title the *Post* translated as "The Odour of Mud and Buffalo."

John Shelton Reed is an aspiring singer-songwriter in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Among his great unrecorded country songs is the classic "My Tears Spoiled My Aim."

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COMMONWEAL

Jeanne Berg

A Future for Europe

by Thomas Molnar

Political scientists are now grumpy. Instead of waxing enthusiastic about the 40 days that shook the world —let us say from the crumbling of the Berlin Wall to Ceausescu's execution —they resent the brutal intrusion of reality on their slumber. It used to be so comfortable to think in terms of superpower pseudo-polarity, and global democratization is likely now to suffer delay. Just four months ago I heard a noted sociologist explain that there was no alternative to capitalist democracy (no, it was not Francis Fukuyama); and now people have the disturbing impression that in East-Central Europe two powers (superpowers?) plus a dozen or so nations are reemerging, whose history is stamped with other than democratic and capitalist traditions. While hands are being wrung and teeth gnashed, history in East Europe renews its course on its accustomed two tracks. One is *geopolitics*, marked mainly by the fluctuating power relationship of Moscow and Berlin, with a vast and immemorially contested area between them. The other is *ideology*, pertaining to the kind of regimes that these nations, mostly in a deep-freeze since 1945, will choose —and so dictate their partners, alliances, place in Europe, and in the world.

A radio station that called to interview me noted that many people are "hysterically" (the interviewer's term) opposed to these changes. That may be so in the New York area; about five hundred million people in Eastern Europe are deliriously, and of course cautiously, happy. This is, after all, what the Wheel of Fortune is about. Hysteria or happiness, the future is no longer in the hands of the smug and unimaginative political class, nor indeed in the hands of the planetary arbitrators in London, Paris, Washington —or Moscow. Nineteen fifty-six, 1968, 1979, 1989 could be ignored by these ex-decision makers in their diplomatic fortresses. They shed a few crocodile tears for show, but the important thing, the status quo, remained. This time, the cry against repression has grown from a whimper to a shout, and cannot be ignored. The sound emanates from a great power, Germany, or rather Prussia.

Prussia has had, of course, a bad press, ever since Frederick the Great and since the dismissal of the Frankfurt Parliament in 1849. But it *is* the province whose mission it has been to reassemble the German fragments — after Napoleon, then again with Bismarck. Thus when Prussians began to march toward the Wall, Moscow knew that the game was up. It is one thing to repress Budapest, Prague, Warsaw, and Riga; quite another to challenge Germany.

In fact, and contrary to the last-minute hopes that Gorbachev would veto reunification, the Soviet leader expected it all along —and welcomed it! Why am I committing to paper such blasphemous words? Unlike those Western commentators who focus their attention on Gorbachev's psychology, sincerity, and his past in Andropov's shadow, let's look at the concrete situation in which he, or whoever would replace him, finds himself.

Gorbachev well knew that the Russians' economic woes were not worse in the 1980's than before, as he also knew that Russia has long been an underdeveloped country, slightly below the level of Nepal. Thus the important thing is not that the Politburo cannot feed the population, but that certain realities that up to now have been ignored —religion and nationhood —have been surfacing everywhere in the empire, dismantling Lenin's fragile construction. Suddenly, in the 80's, Moslems and Christians went on the offensive, both as religious faiths and national entities. Years before the Berlin Wall crumbled, Gorbachev knew it was over.

Under the circumstances, his task has been to save the Russian Empire and to associate it, in spite of the shouts from Tallinn to Bucharest of "Russki, out!," with a nonoccupied East Europe. This, again, is not merely an economic issue; during more than four decades marked by blood and hatred, Russia became nevertheless used to contact with Europe, not only as an occupying power, but also as what one may describe as a cultural contact. Russia clearly derives benefits of all sorts from this association. Her offer of a partnership would be rejected by her previous victims, however, unless it were guaranteed by East Europe's natural protector *vis-à-vis* Muscovy: a strong, hence unified, Germany.

With this guarantee and no other do these nations welcome the Moscow connection. A sure sign of this is Vaclav Havel's recommendation to Congress that the U.S. help Russia overcome its deep difficulties. Jozsef Antall, Hungarian party leader, sounded a similar note: the area needs a consolidated Germany. The two requests stem from a sure grasp of geopolitics: the main condition of East European stability is German-Russian cooperation.

One hopes that the American reader understands the significance of all this. Walesa, Havel, and Antall want the Soviet troops out. At the same time

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all three are aware that the forever turbulent regional powers, Russia and Germany, must be locked into a policy of mutual benefit, if the national projects of the other East European countries are to succeed—incidentally, the first such projects since about 1500, when the Turkish night descended on the East European Renaissance, and successive reigns of Habsburgs and Muscovites snuffed out all velleities of independence. But finally now, from Zagreb to Kiev, from Riga to Sofia, there is a tremendous will on the part of all nations to shape their own destinies.

Can the West understand it, with its own independent political evolution and its protected culture? Hardly.

It may be that the seeds of new East/West conflicts are just now being planted, and that the planned "European unity" will be the first casualty. Some things ought to be evident: there was full independence in the area only between 1920 and 1940, 20 years out of five centuries, and even that was threatened by the need for Prague, Warsaw, Bucharest, Vilnius, and Belgrade to live in Germany's shadow against Russia, or as Soviet client-states *vis-à-vis* Germany. The Western powers, then as now, were interested only in investments, not in the political consolidation of places where they invested. Hence the first importance and the urgency *today* is for a Russo-German cooperation, a *Mitlebensraum*. (I said, *today*; in twenty or thirty years Berlin and Moscow may be at war again.)

Where would this settlement leave NATO, the American presence in Europe, and Europe's 1992 political union? Perhaps in a kind of diplomatic no-man's-land. Institutions, alliances, and military bases are likely to survive for a while, but since they will be in nobody's particular interest, they may just wither away, and the European political union with them. The tacit purpose of that union has been to tie Germany indissolubly to West Europe, to spare France the embarrassment of declining from a second-rate to a third-rate power, and to save England from a new threat from the continent. But with the falling dominoes Germany will henceforth not volunteer to have chains put on her eighty million people by a weak, strike-ridden, and inefficient France where the battle between Louis XVI and Robespierre is still raging. Nor will Germany remain "European" for the sake of England's sense of security. Of course, what bureaucrats in Brussels and Strasbourg have so far concocted, a maze of laws impossible to implement, is likely to remain "on the books." But January 1, 1993, will come and go, the union will be postponed, and then forgotten—except that Germany and Japan will use the documents as justification for submerging Europe under their merchandise.

Are all these revolutionary changes? Mitterrand, pathetically attempting to keep Germany divided, or at least keep a united Germany chained to "Europe," had the right words: "We are retreating to the 19th century!" That is, into suspicious nations, powerblocks inside Europe, hegemonies. With danger from the East receding, then vanishing, politics will again take the place of ideology. It is a secret only to idealistic Westerners that before 1940 the East European countries were exploited economically by England, France, Germany, and Belgium, for their oil, iron, bauxite, cattle, agricultural products, and electricity. Lower wages than those in the West now again attract investors hoping to cut costs, then re-export. A neocolonial situation may arise that local governments and revived labor unions will hardly cherish.

Another issue was voiced by Italy's foreign minister, Gianni de Michelis. In a recent interview he refused to hide fears that a united Europe would have its gravitational center somewhere between Paris and Berlin, a northern axis. His own project is to call into existence a Barcelona-Marseilles-Trieste-Ljubljana-Budapest line, the southern axis, as a counterweight. An Italian, Austrian, Yugoslavian, and Hungarian block is already getting underway.

Recent visits and conversations shed further light on the future of East and Central Europe, a future that is fast becoming the present. One watches with amazement the ease with which people settle into new conditions, how their moral and intellectual orientation has not changed in four decades of misery. Suddenly, problems declared by Western experts to be insoluble seem to dissipate. For many years it was held, for example, that young people had surrendered to nihilism, were interested only in videos and drugs. It has also been said that German students want consumer goods, not reunification, etc., etc. The truth is vastly different. Conversations have convinced me that a large elite—professors, students, journalists, scholars, party leaders—exists, ready to take matters in hand. Students, seventeen and eighteen years old, were the first to drive trucks with food and clothing to Transylvania upon the news that Ceausescu had fallen, although the Securitate shot down a good number; retired people, poor among the poor, brought forth their provisions of canned food to offer it to hungry compatriots. With all this, there is a veritable renaissance of studies and scholarship. The rector of a college in Budapest showed me dissertations as richly documented as the best in Western universities.

It is, of course, not possible to convey all the signs of this blooming of a new life. It is nothing short of a miracle that, squeezed for 50 years between oriental despotism and Western decomposition, Eastern Europe has survived internally intact. I have seen decolonization in Africa and Asia accompanied neither by joy nor by an outburst of nation- and culture-building energy. What I find in "decolonized" Eastern Europe is very different. It is almost enough to restore one's faith in Western man and Christian civilization.

Finally, the German question. A great power always poses problems, but mainly for those who believe that relations between nations ought to be love affairs. It is hard to love even a small country from the point of view of another, and it is impossible to love a great power. Rome, Spain, England—none were loved when they were at their zenith, nor is the U.S. today. Germany as a past and future great power is in a special class because it is a continental power, wedged among jealous states over which it exercises political and cultural hegemony. (It is better for a great power to be geographically distant from its clients.) Yet Germany is European through and through; its blood and sinews are continental, from Arminius to Barbarossa, from Goethe to Heidegger. In spite of

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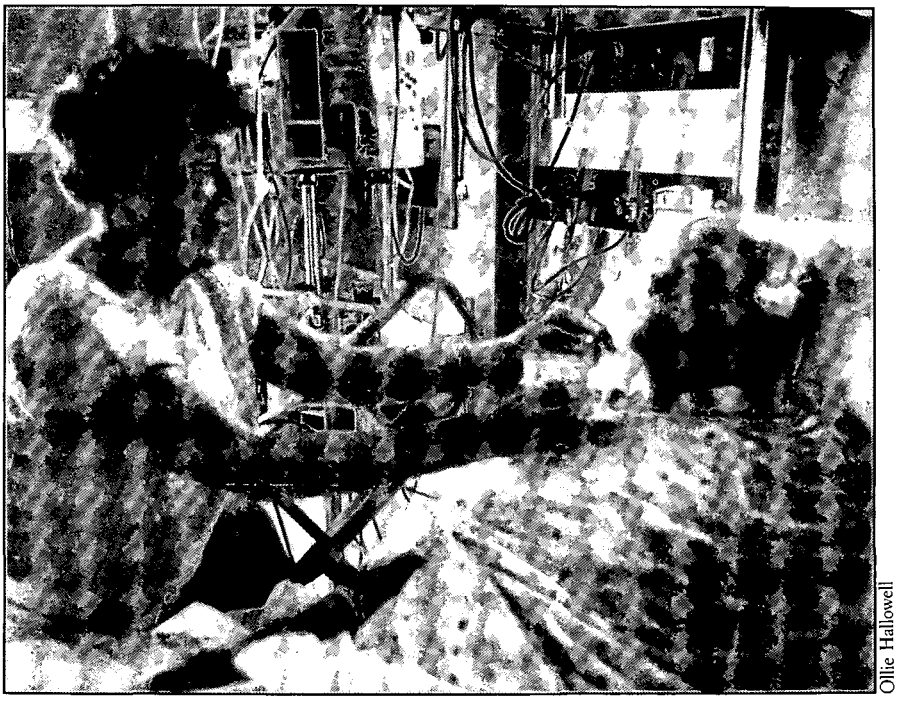
what the newspapers say, at no time in the last forty years did its neighbors detest it. They were merely then as they will be in the future—vigilant, the normal thing among neighbors. For the rest, it will be a symbiotic relationship, a shared culture. Look at the cities: Vienna, Prague, Budapest, Krakow, Riga, Dresden—they speak of one tradition, style, religion, and taste, blending the aristocratic and the bourgeois, the ensemble celebrated by churches, palaces, bridges, and public gardens. The new society, settling on the ruins of the old, will be harmonious with it.

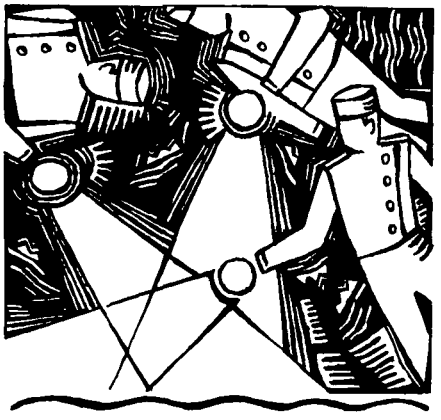
Thomas Molnar is the author, most recently, of Twin Powers: Politics and the Sacred *(Eerdmans).*



Ollie Hallowell

From Frederick Wiseman's documentary Near Death.

FILM



Jeanne Berg

One Wiseman of Gotham

by David R. Slavitt

The distinguished documentaries of Frederick Wiseman presuppose two things. First of all, there are the technical advances in film and cameras that allow him to shoot with less cumbersome equipment than would have been possible a generation ago and to do so in available light. Second, and rather more important, is Wiseman's discovery of one of the truths of human nature, which is that most of us don't have a great deal of range in our behaviors. People don't change much in the presence of a camera, because they can't. Even talented actors and actresses who have studied their craft cannot depart very far from the selves they've learned and earned. And when people are convinced that what they're doing is correct—either necessary or justifiable, or positively admirable—they see no reason to change their behavior. This is where the drama and the comedy enter into a Wiseman documentary. We watch in amazement as he catches people in ethical and metaphysical quandaries and impossibilities and, if we are shrewd enough to see what is going on, we are both appalled and amused. The right way to watch a Wiseman film is to laugh a lot.

One would think that, sooner or later, some smart administrator would figure out that there is a pattern to these things. In each case, Wiseman comes in and shoots what he sees, sixty, seventy, or eighty hours of film. Then he goes back and edits this to make a documentary in which there is no narrative and no additional material, just the raw stuff of what the camera saw, albeit ordered and shaped. And what he offers is *Titicut Follies*, or *High School*, or *Law and Order*, or *Welfare*, or *Manoeuvre*, or *Essene*, or *The Store*, or, most recently, *Near Death*. Often he will show the film to the people who are in it—as happened, I think, with *High School*. The teachers there were just delighted, recognizing that, yes, this was just how it was with them. And then Wiseman shows these films to the outside world, more often than not on PBS, but frequently at film festivals and on campuses. And the outside world looks and sees what is really happening, which was, in *High School*, vastly less flattering, or defensible, or even sane than what the teachers in the Philadelphia high school assumed.

The tendencies to self-delusion are irrepressible, however, and we see, again and again, these do-gooders of one kind or another betraying themselves and everything they think they stand for. In *Law and Order* there is a memorable scene in a squad car in which, in the backseat, a Kansas City police officer is beating up a suspect who is, if I remember correctly, handcuffed. What is astonishing is that, while cameras are smaller and quieter than they used to be, they aren't invisible, and Wiseman was in the front seat filming this. What had happened was that the suspect, a black man, had called the policeman a motherf---er, and this, to the cop, a lower-middle-class white man, was a legitimate warrant for a beating.

The general sense one gets, seeing a number of Wiseman films, is that there may be something pernicious in all cooperative human enterprises, and

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the more lofty the purpose of these collaborations, the more they are likely to arrogate to themselves a wide range of powers and perquisites, which they inevitably abuse. Wiseman seems not to be so much shocked by these perversions and betrayals as amused. There is also the dolorous satisfaction in seeing the confirmation, yet again, of his more or less dismal expectations. *Near Death* is one of his most ambitious undertakings, running as it does to just under six hours. It was shot in the MICU (Medical Intensive Care Unit) of Beth Israel Hospital in Boston, and it shows the progress or, more often, deterioration of four patients, upon whom the doctors and nurses and technicians lavish their expensive attentions.

The work is a powerful one, as clear, simple, dramatic, and eloquent as any documentary in the history of film. Even at this epic length, it goes quickly, and one is amazed that so much time has elapsed. But for all its power and simplicity, it seems to have puzzled some of the professionals. Susan Wolf, a jurisprudent from the Hastings Center in Briarcliff Manor who reviewed it for *The New England Journal of Medicine*, remarked that "It performs a great service, revealing a reality many laypeople and doctors are sure to face. The film provides no overarching commentary, however, to put into perspective the practices it depicts."

Well, what it doesn't have is one of those great narrative voices lecturing us in a voice-over about the urgent need for action if the Amazon rain forests are to be saved. It doesn't propose anything. But it asks some fundamental, even radical questions, the first one of which is whether these heroic measures of ICU care, including intubation and cardiopulmonary resuscitation, make any sense. Is there a benefit, either to the patients, or to their families, that justifies the enormous expense and the exquisite prolongation of suffering? Of the four patients we follow, two die in the unit, one makes it out of the unit and back to the ward and dies there, and one actually makes it out of the hospital and goes home.

But is this enough of a benefit to warrant the enormous distortion of resources that these units represent? As one discouraged senior doctor remarks in the course of the film, two-thirds of the medical care costs of an entire lifetime will be incurred during the last three weeks of a person's life. "It falls to the viewer," Wolf writes in *The New England Journal*, "to deduce the strengths and weaknesses of those practices and to glean the lessons of 'Near Death.'" The first lesson is that there ought to be some consideration about these MICU's, some discussion of whether they ought not to be just shut down tomorrow.

There are several shots in the film of janitors who come around to sweep the floors and to empty the wastebaskets. These are not just background events or devices to allow for cutaways; Wiseman repeats them so that there is no question but that he is making a particular point of them. They intrude, at first simply as punctuation and then, as they continue to recur, as metonymic commentary. We come to see that the MICU is like a giant organism with the doctors and nurses as its attendants, taking care of the garbage just as the black janitor is doing. He pushes his mop and empties the trash, trying not to get too involved in his depressing surroundings and the interminability of his own tasks. The doctors and nurses are doing more or less the same thing, but their efforts to keep uninvolved are less successful. Their patients fail and die and they can't help feeling failure and grieving for these inevitable losses. We see these people extending themselves not only as scientists but as humane sources of comfort and strength to the patients and their families. But highly trained health care professionals though they may be, they don't seem to have any control of the direction in which they are going. The hospital and the unit might as well be running on automatic pilot. The questions these doctors and nurses face are not strategic, but only tactical and logistic.

The direction of medicine, after all, has been taken from physicians by a society that recognizes how these are questions in which we all ought to have some say. Medical care changes outcomes (which it didn't use to do), and it is no longer a luxury, but is perceived as a social or civil right. The allocation of resources is something we all have a stake in. And we don't trust the doctors any longer to do the right thing by each

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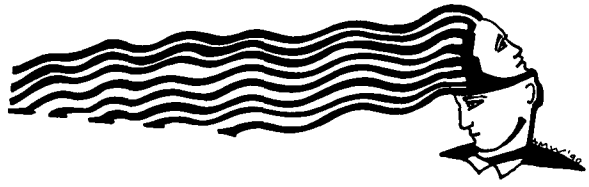

THE PARTY OF THE COMMON MAN

A transsexual convicted of murder in 1961 said in March that she planned to stay in the race for the Harris County (Texas) Democratic Party chairmanship. Leslie Elaine Perez, age 52, finished second in a four-person race, receiving 27 percent of the vote to 42 percent for Ken Bentsen Jr., a nephew of Senator Lloyd Bentsen. A runoff between the two was set for April 10.

Perez, president of Houston's chapter of Gay and Lesbian Democrats of America, says she was born Leslie Douglas Ashley but became Leslie Elaine Green when she underwent sex-change surgery after her release from prison in 1971. When questioned about her Hispanic surname, she said it "comes from a boyfriend of mine."

Perez and a codefendant were convicted of capital murder in the shooting-and-torching slaying of a Houston man, for which both received the death penalty. Their convictions, however, were overturned, and after a second trial Perez was sentenced to 15 years in prison, only five of which he ended up serving.

Outgoing party chairman Jack Carter said a lengthy runoff campaign would benefit neither Ms. Perez nor the local Democratic Party, which was shaken in 1988 by the election to the party chairmanship of Claude Jones, a supporter of fringe presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche. Carter has encouraged Perez to drop out of the race.

"I didn't think [the murder conviction] was going to come up again," said Perez. "I just want to help get Democrats elected."

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of us. So the politicians have had their say, and through them, the people.

But what is it that we have said? The message is that we are cheap and cowardly. A more generous or merely more intelligent expenditure of medical resources would provide some of the things that aren't necessarily reimbursed by third-party payers (or at least not under the present operating rules) but that save lives. Pap smears for all the women in the hospital's cachement area and sigmoidoscopies for all men over 50 would cost comparatively little and would produce enormously greater benefits than these fortunes that are being spent in the MICU's. The advantages are not merely economic but medical—in the early diagnosis of disease (which is critical if there is to be a cure). But we're too cheap for that. And yet when we are faced with death, when it's right there at the door, huffing and puffing like the big bad wolf, our tight-fistedness relaxes, and we become suddenly generous and even profligate, throwing vast sums around as if we could buy immortality and revise the human condition, or at least snatch one or another poor sufferer back from the yawning of the grave.

Well, who can be against that? How can one question the motives and practices of an institution that dedicates itself to such an enterprise? We are all in favor of life and against death, aren't we? But we see that the realities are being ignored, and the death of reason is also something to worry about. The agonizing exchanges between the doctors and the family members that Wiseman shows us with searing intimacy and poignancy are unimaginably complicated as the doctors cajole or bully or just wait for the poor wife or husband to realize how there isn't anything more to be gained by these grotesque and invasive methodologies. There are now hard decisions to be made about whether to continue to strive for a cure or to bow to the inevitable and supply only palliative care, and although the families now get to collaborate in these decisions, there is something terribly unfair about how unprepared they are and how the collaborative process results in their feeling a much greater degree of complicity and guilt.

The doctors do what they do; the families and the patients do what they do; and then there is the ultimate garbage-bag scene, in which a team of nurses runs a corpse down to the morgue and (one, two, three, heave!) gets it from the guerney onto the slab. And later on, the hearse comes from the mortuary to take away the remains. This isn't what always happens, but the survival rate of the MICU's is not good, is in fact much less good than the rate of survival of Wiseman's group of patients. The question then suggests itself as to what these people suppose themselves to be doing.

The answer is not spelled out. Wiseman doesn't do that. But anyone who knows anything about medical training can see that there are teams of interns and residents who are passing through, learning how from the patients no matter what the outcome. There are attending physicians who are competent and decent but who can't work miracles, and one of them admits that this one month a year in the MICU is about all he can stand. The steady players are the nurses who work here year-round, and the hospital itself, a huge machine that has contrived a way of converting the suffering of the doctors and the patients and their families to reimbursement from insurance companies and agencies of the government.

Wiseman's first documentary film was *Titicut Follies*, about the Bridgewater State Hospital for the Criminally Insane, and he found in that film that the doctors were crazier than the patients. The guards were the only human and helpful people around, and their efforts were more or less eclipsed by a system that was at once grotesque and pleased with itself. Wiseman has since aimed his camera at other institutions, all of which to one degree or another resemble hospitals for the criminally insane. That the doctors and nurses are performing admirably, doing their best in a hopeless and absurd situation, only makes it more painful to watch. *Near Death* isn't just about Beth Israel's MICU but about all of American society, or even life itself, for another way to describe life is to say that it isn't death but only—and always—near it.

David R. Slavitt is a poet and novelist living in Philadelphia. His latest novel is Lives of the Saints *(Atheneum).*

MORES

Jeanne Berg

Lemons

by Janet Scott Barlow

When he was younger, my son would pipe up from time to time with what he called "Scott's rules to live by," his distinctly personal little life guides. My all-time favorite, arrived at when he was seven, was "Never get your hair cut by a man named Buster." But the tidbit I would ponder most over the years was this: "Don't hire repairmen on Mondays." I have no idea how my son arrived at the haircut rule (he didn't know anyone, much less a barber, by the name of Buster), but the no-repairmen-on-Mondays idea addressed a specific problem. Strange things were going on in his household, and the boy was just trying to help.

My husband and I happen to be completely devoid of skills in the area of home improvement and repair, and utterly lacking in desire to acquire those skills. While we would prefer that this situation were different, we have come to accept what is, the way you eventually accept flat feet or the inability to carry a tune—regretfully but philosophically. In the great genetic roulette game of life, you win some and you lose some, and why fight it? (I prefer to think of our ineptitude as genetic and therefore unalterable because it removes the possibility, and thus the responsibility, of learning awful things like wiring—or, worse yet, *re*wiring.)

I'm not sure we're missing much anyway. We have friends who can take an old house, a mere *shack*, and turn it into a showplace, complete with guest

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wing and antique door moldings they found in a pasture somewhere. But they pay a terrible price for this ability, as people with irrepressible talent often do. They go around for three years (the required renovation period) looking like they just witnessed a traffic accident. They begin to talk incessantly about wood and become oblivious to the bits of dried plaster stuck to their forearms. And when they are finally finished, they go and sell the place, which I don't understand at all. If I were capable of turning a shack into a showplace with my own hands, I would want to gaze upon it for as long as I lived, and I'd make my children promise to maintain it after I was gone, sort of like a shrine.

Obviously, this is something I will never have to worry about. My husband and I have other concerns. It is our lot in life to be the kind of people who are repelled by the thought of handling lumber or discovering what the inside of our TV looks like; the kind of people who think words like *wrench* and *power tool* have the ring of violence.

As a result, we have been forced throughout our marriage to "hire help." If talent extracts a price, well, ineptitude is no picnic either. Over the years, the cost of enjoying plaster-free forearms and an unintimidating toolbox (half a dozen bent screwdrivers, a bag of old washers, and a hand-me-down electric drill that originated in my husband's family only slightly after my husband did) has been the acceptance in our house of a regular parade of plumbers, carpenters, and repairmen.

You might think that bringing trained professionals into a situation such as ours would be a comfort—an expensive comfort, but a comfort nonetheless. And you might be wrong. We have discovered that these men generally are just human extensions of the appliances we fear and the skills we lack. The various tradesmen we have hired over the years have been responsible for some of the weirdest moments of my life—so weird, in fact, that my son figured that there *had* to be a reason for it, and the reason was that these people always seemed to show up on Monday.

But that theory was put to the test when a carpet installer showed up at 8:30 on a Wednesday morning and spoke his first words to me: "Boy, it's hot. You got any beer?" I gave him the only reasonable answer I could think of under the circumstances: "No." That might have been a mistake, because an hour later my son came downstairs and announced, "The carpet guy is asleep on the bedroom floor."

And there was the summer we hired a carpenter, highly recommended, to build a deck in our backyard. The carpenter's name was Harvey, and he was aided in his labors by a son called Duke. On the days he actually showed up, Harvey would, at the slightest opportunity, pop open a bottle of Pepsi-Cola ("aluminum cans will make you sick," said Harvey) and tell me things about himself I really didn't care to know, such as, "I'm allergic to fruit." For his part, Duke would kick back, Pepsi in hand, and relate the plots of his favorite Burt Reynolds movies. And it was Duke who asked one of the most memorable questions ever put to me. Seeing my two children come in from school one day, children who happen to be not only different ages and sexes but also different races (not hard to figure out when you think about it), Duke desired to know, "Are they fraternal twins?"

And then there were the screw-ups, like the paperhanger who pasted a strip of wallpaper over a plugged-in radio cord. When I pointed out this error, he said, "Damn, I guess I'll have to fix that." And not to be forgotten is the TV repairman who listened to me explain the problem with my television, then asked, "Are you American?" I said that yes, I was American and why did he want to know? Said he, "I thought by the way you talk you might be from Boston." *If I'm from Boston, this must be Monday.*

But my favorite (in a manner of speaking) encounter with a repairman came the first time my garbage disposal quit on me. I called a plumber, who showed up at my door two hours later accompanied by a man of slight build whom the plumber introduced as "my assistant, Dickie." The plumber went directly to the disposal, while Dickie huffed and grunted as he dragged toward my kitchen a large and ominous piece of equipment that looked like a weapon from a World War II movie. This pair would become known in our house forevermore as "Dickie and the so-called plumber."

When the so-called plumber had finished his examination of the disposal, I said, "So what's the problem?" The so-called plumber hesitated briefly, looked me in the eye, and told me, "It's broke." It was one of those moments when you feel like your life is a movie and you've been forced into a seat to watch the show. There I was, asking, "*Why* is it broken?" There was Dickie, preparing the war weapon for use. And there was the so-called plumber, giving me his professional evaluation: "Probably it's a lemon."

To make a long story short, I called a second so-called plumber, who installed a new disposal, which caught on fire six months later. I hired plumber number three. Told him my disposal had caught on fire. Told him it was only six months old. And he told me, "You got a lemon."

In fairness to tradesmen, I should say that I have had a few positive experiences over the years. Twice my washing machine was repaired without incident. And years ago I hired a house painter who was a gem—honest, competent, neat, and good-humored—and we became friends. But he retired last summer and turned his business over to his nephew—discouraging news, since I am almost positive there is a rule somewhere (I'll have to check with my son) about not hiring people's nephews.

And while I'm afraid to say it out loud, I have even found a good plumber—an elderly Italian man who works with his two sons, neither of them named Duke. When they come to my house to fix something (they recently installed my fourth garbage disposal), "the boys" attend to business while Pop, who sits at the table shooting the breeze, yells sporadic instructions in Italian in their direction. These men show up on time and clean up when they are finished. They don't ask for beer, and never once in my presence have they used the word *lemon*. Still, I avoid taking chances. I try not to call them on Mondays. It's true: superstition accompanies ignorance. It's also true that I would never get my hair cut by a man named Buster.

Janet Scott Barlow covers popular culture from Cincinnati.

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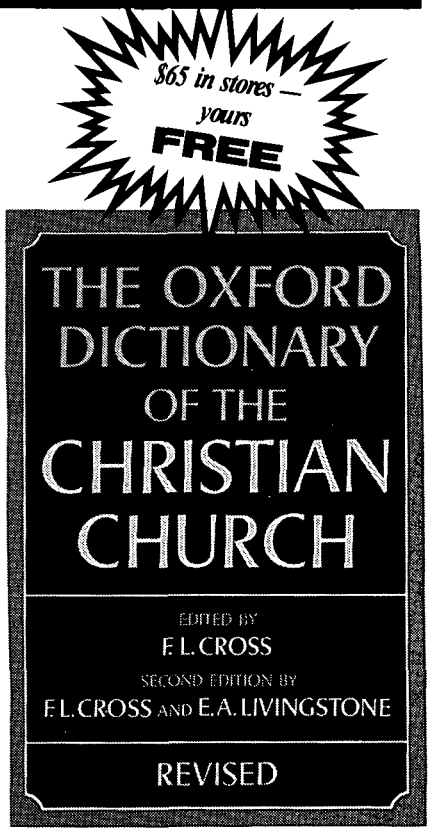
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